United Nations CRC/C/SR.2057

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
14 January 2016

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child
Seventy-first session

Summary record of the 2057th (Chamber B) meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 12 January 2016, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Mezmur

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Combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Islamic Republic of Iran (continued)

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Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Committee at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third and fourth periodic reports of the Islamic Republic of Iran (continued) (CRC/C/IRN/3-4; CRC/C/IRN/Q/3-4 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Abbasi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that families played a fundamental role in his country's social system. Interaction with NGOs was also crucial in the promotion of children's rights. He noted that the Committee had earlier raised questions concerning the training of judges for juvenile courts, the age of criminal responsibility, the minimum age of marriage, the question of execution and how the State dealt with situations in which children witnessed hangings, beheadings or honour killings.

3. **Mr. Mohades** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that a training centre for judges had been set up in 2006 to provide both initial and in-service training. Judges underwent a one-year training course and were required to pass a rigorous examination. In-service training courses, taught by professors and senior judges, were obligatory for judges wishing to be promoted. Training workshops could be organized at the request of provincial prosecutors, such as one on human and civil rights recently conducted in Kerman province.

4. Under the Children and Adolescents Protection Act of 2002, a person inflicting physical, mental or moral damage on a child, including a parent, was liable to 3-6 months' imprisonment or a fine, or both. Legal action could be taken by the State. Alternatively, under article 66 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, NGOs could apply for proceedings to be instituted. As for the age of criminal responsibility, new legislation had been introduced in 2013 and revised in 2014. Under the previous law, the age of criminal responsibility had been 9 years for girls and 15 years for boys. The current situation was that, under the age of 9 years, children of either sex had no criminal responsibility. Between the ages of 9 and 15 years, it was up to a judge to decide whether a child should be handed over to his or her parents or guardian, who were required to guarantee the child's good conduct, or whether the child should be committed to a correction and rehabilitation centre for up to nine months or, in the case of a child between 12 and 15 years of age, up to one year. Since religious morality and social customs were the basis of the law in the Islamic Republic of Iran, children aged between 15 and 18 years were dealt with according to their understanding of the nature of the offence committed and the level of remorse they showed. A distinction should be drawn between execution and *qisas*. Both involved deprivation of life, but the criminal procedures were completely different. No executions of persons under the age of 18 years were carried out, even in cases involving drugs. The Government was proud that, over the previous three years, the punishment of children and adolescents had decreased by one quarter.

5. **Ms. Winter** (Coordinator, Country Task Force) asked what the speaker meant by the word "unconventional", used by the interpreter in relation to the punishment of children. She also asked whether a judge could request a medical assessment of a child's capacity to understand why a particular action was forbidden by law.

6. **Mr. Kotrane** noted that, even under the 2013 revision of the Islamic Penal Code, the death penalty was not prohibited for persons under 18 years of age, even if it was normally not implemented. It appeared that the courts sometimes waited until a person reached the age of 18 years before executing that person for an offence committed earlier. It was indisputable that the Supreme Court had ruled that domestic law

prevailed over international treaties to which the Islamic Republic of Iran was a party, and a member of the delegation had said the previous day that all rules and regulations must be in line with sharia law. The Committee welcomed the news that the age limit for criminal responsibility had been raised, but he would be grateful for confirmation that the death penalty was not applied when a person who had committed a capital offence reached the age of 18 years.

7. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** asked whether, under the new law, a child who could not afford a lawyer was given legal aid and whether a child's views could be heard in court. She also wondered whether any allowances were made for offences by children and whether there was a difference in the blood price for women and men.

8. **Mr. Mohades** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that "unconventional" punishment related to punishment that caused a child any kind of physical, psychological or moral damage. As for the concept of *qisas*, it was up to the judge to prove that a murder had been committed, in the case of an offender between the ages of 15 and 18 years, and that the culprit recognized the nature of the offence. In reply to Mr. Kotrane, he said that *qisas* could be issued for a child under 18 years, but an appeal could be mounted at every stage. The family of the victim had the right to forgive the perpetrator and accept blood money. There was no question of executing a person for a crime that he or she had committed while still a minor.

9. **Mr. Moghareh Abed** (Islamic Republic Iran) said that a mature person and a person under the age of 18 years could be spared *qisas* if there was any doubt about his or her guilt or if he or she was unable to understand the nature of the offence. He drew the Committee's attention to the cases of a number of young men whose cases had been retried or in which *qisas* had not been implemented. In such cases, other forms of punishment were imposed: children could be sent to correction centres or given fines.

10. **The Chair** (Country Task Force) requested further details of cases in which juvenile offenders had been found to possess the mental growth and maturity required to be held criminally responsible and had subsequently been sentenced to death after a retrial. He asked what measures were taken to ensure that all juvenile offenders on death row were informed of their right to request a retrial under article 91 of the Islamic Penal Code and invited the delegation to comment on the case of Samad Zahabi, who had been executed in October 2015 despite an alleged failure to inform him of his rights.

11. **Mr. Abbasi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, with regard to unconventional punishment, while parents or legal guardians had the right to punish minors, they could not commit acts that caused visible harm, such as flogging. If they did, courts could strip them of custody.

12. Sentences in capital cases were reviewed by high courts, which took into account a number of criteria when establishing the criminal liability of offenders. Commissions of experts were in place to examine all aspects of such cases and to provide judges with comprehensive information on which to base their decisions. If any one of the criteria for criminal liability was not satisfied, judges were precluded from imposing the death penalty. The cases mentioned by the Chair were scheduled for review.

13. **Mr. Kotrane** said that the steps that had been taken to reduce the number of cases in which the death penalty was imposed on persons under the age of 18 years were commendable but insufficient. The State party should abolish the death penalty for persons under 18 years of age, in line with the recommendation made by the Committee in paragraph 30 of its previous concluding observations (CRC/C/15/Add.254), which had been drafted in 2005.

14. **Mr. Abbasi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, since 2005, the Government's policy with regard to the death penalty had changed and significant progress had been made. All persons under 18 years of age were entitled to the assistance of counsel, which helped ensure respect for the right to a retrial in capital cases. Moreover, the judges tasked with handling such cases were highly experienced. The Government would continue to review domestic laws that provided for the death penalty.

15. **Mr. Mohades** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, pursuant to a decree issued by the Supreme Court, persons sentenced to death under the *qisas* principle prior to the entry into force of the Islamic Penal Code of 2013 and who were under 18 years of age at the time of the offence were entitled to a retrial in accordance with article 91 of the Code.

16. **Mr. Farid** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, according to recent studies, 90 per cent of street children lived with at least one of their parents and did not tend to sleep on the streets, almost 10 per cent lived with other relatives or friends, and only around 1 per cent had no family support at all. In order to offer protection to the most vulnerable children, emergency social services were in operation in 190 cities across the country, and a helpline had been set up to provide psychological and social assistance. Mobile units had also been established to enable health professionals to intervene on the ground when appropriate, and a leaflet was being produced to provide instructions to police officers on how to deal with street children. In the previous three years, day-care centres had been created for street children in 15 provinces, with a concentration of efforts in large cities. In Tehran, a shelter had been built to offer accommodation to homeless children under the age of 12 years.

17. With regard to disadvantaged children in general, special measures were being taken in rural areas, which were home to 30 per cent of the country's total population. Around 7,000 kindergartens had been opened, of which 1,200 were in marginalized rural areas, where enrolment fees were significantly lower than those charged in urban areas and were borne in part by the Government. To combat undernutrition, a plan had been launched to provide at least one meal a day to those in need. Recent studies showed that the plan was proving effective in cutting undernutrition, but more time was needed to gauge its impact on stunted growth.

18. Since the Eighth Global Conference on Health Promotion had been held in Helsinki, Finland, in 2013, the State Welfare Organization had drawn up several plans to promote the full-fledged development of children and had recommended that, in its sixth national development plan, the Government should allocate 1 per cent of the gross domestic product to supporting children.

19. More than three decades had passed since the inception of a primary health-care network in the country. During that time, the infant mortality rate had decreased from around 100 to 10 per 1,000 live births and life expectancy had risen considerably. The Ministry of Health and Medical Education was distributing health packages in marginalized areas. Of the 12 million residents in such areas, almost 10 million had access to primary health care, and steps were being taken to extend coverage to the remaining 2 million. A national child development plan had been formulated and was being implemented.

20. The comprehensive law on the protection of persons with disabilities, which had been adopted in 2004, was under review in parliament as a result of studies conducted in close cooperation with NGOs. The State Welfare Organization had recommended that the revised law should provide for greater health coverage for children with disabilities.

21. Measures had been adopted to promote the early detection of disability, particularly through monitoring before and during pregnancy and in kindergartens, and

to supply cochlear implants and other medical devices and software. Community-based rehabilitation services were also being provided, and a network of NGOs had been created to protect the rights of children with disabilities.

22. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** asked how the State party could guarantee that the children's helpline was accessible in remote and resource-poor areas. Noting that many street children had chosen to leave their family homes owing to a negative home environment, she asked whether those children were consulted before being returned to their families and whether alternative solutions were proposed if they did not wish to return home.

23. **Mr. Cardona Llorens**, noting that the State party's approach to dealing with children with disabilities placed a strong emphasis on medical solutions, emphasized that disability did not equate to illness. He asked whether the State party would consider adopting a human rights-based approach to the issue and take measures to create inclusive environments that would enable children with disabilities to exercise their human rights on an equal footing with their non-disabled peers.

24. **Ms. Oviedo Fierro** asked whether breastfeeding was encouraged in the Islamic Republic of Iran, in line with international standards.

The meeting was suspended at 11.30 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.

25. **Mr. Abbasi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that an initiative had been taken, in coordination with the United Nations Children's Fund, under which an Iranian delegation had travelled to New Zealand to receive special training and to learn from that country's experience in setting up a children's police force. The Islamic Republic of Iran had subsequently established its own children's police force, which included experts who were trained in dealing with vulnerable children. He emphasized the vital role that female police officers could play in that regard and the need for highly specialized police training to ensure the protection of children.

26. **Mr. Hajianzadeh** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his country operated an inclusive education system that enabled children with disabilities or special needs to study in mainstream schools to the greatest extent possible. Of the 120,000 school-age children with disabilities in the country, 50,000 were enrolled in mainstream schools and 70,000 were enrolled in special schools. The education of children with disabilities was monitored by relevant NGOs.

27. **Ms. Ja'fari** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that, while female genital mutilation (FGM) occurred in certain areas of the country, the Government was taking various legislative and practical measures to eradicate the practice entirely. The National Body for the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs had signed a memorandum of understanding on the launch of a programme to address the issue of FGM. Under that programme, relevant training courses would be offered to various stakeholders, including representatives of the Ministry of Health, and Sunni leaders would be encouraged to use their influence to raise awareness of the issue among affected groups of the population. In addition, the national plan of action on children's rights aimed to create a child-friendly culture, in part by combating negative traditional practices such as FGM.

28. The Government was determined to prevent early marriage and was implementing legislative and practical measures to that end. Marriage below the minimum legal age of 13 years for girls and 15 years for boys was subject to the fulfilment of three conditions: authorization on the part of the child's parents or guardians; a positive assessment that the marriage was in the best interests of the child; and the issuance of a certificate by a family court. A number of legal provisions, based on children's sexual and mental maturity and their ability to fulfil their

responsibilities within the marriage, offered protection from early or forced marriage and provided for the nullification of marriage certificates and compensation in cases where children were married against their will. The practice of early marriage was rooted in the traditional beliefs of certain groups of the population, and measures should be taken to raise awareness of the issue among those groups. The Vice Presidency for Women and Family Affairs was working to combat early marriage, and the National Body for the Convention on the Rights of the Child had held a workshop on the topic that had produced recommendations and guidelines on the issuance of early marriage certificates by family courts.

29. **Mr. Hajianzadeh** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that all citizens were guaranteed the inalienable right to education and that obstruction of a girl's education by her parents or spouse was criminalized by law. Sex education, including consultation services and information on family planning, was covered by school curricula.

30. **Ms. Winter**, noting that the Act on the Protection of Children and Adolescents with No Guardian or an Abusive Guardian entitled guardians to have sexual intercourse with girls as young as 9 years (based on the lunar calendar), asked whether that right had ever been exercised. If not, why was it still included in the law? The Civil Code entitled a husband to deny his wife permission to access her right to education, and she asked whether there were any plans to abolish that provision.

31. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** asked whether the State party intended to review the minimum age of marriage, which was currently far too low and could be considered a form of sexual violence, particularly in the case of girls. She asked the State party to provide statistics concerning divorces among children who had entered into early marriage and asked whether such marriages could be contested in court if they had not been registered.

32. **Mr. Nelson** (Country Task Force) asked whether he was right in thinking that there was effectively no minimum age of marriage provided the three conditions that had been described were met. He also requested more information on the children's police force.

33. **Mr. Abbasi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that children under the minimum age of marriage could marry subject to fulfilment of the three criteria mentioned, but such cases were exceptional and the practice of early marriage was not widely accepted in Iranian society. While there was an ongoing need for awareness-raising and training in that area, the country had taken a very important step forward in defining the child, under various laws and policies, as any person under the age of 18 years.

34. **Mr. Farid** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that a study conducted across 10 provinces of the State party had revealed that many people were unaware that a social emergency helpline was available. Consequently, the Government had launched a media and advocacy plan and had held meetings with teachers' associations in order to increase their ability to identify whether a child was being subjected to abuse. Social emergency services existed in many cities across Iran, with a current coverage of 80,000 persons, although the aim was to increase their reach.

35. A solution to the problem of street children was yet to be found. Almost 80 per cent of street children in Iran were not orphans, and specialized social workers were needed in order to address the issues that forced such children onto the streets, such as drug addiction and incompetent guardianship. If a judge ruled that a child's parents were incompetent, the child would be settled in a special centre. The child would only be returned to his or her parents if a judge and any social workers working on the case deemed the parents fit to take appropriate care of the child.

36. With regard to children with disabilities, the Government was aware that social support and changes in social attitudes were as important as medical support. A number of measures had been taken to increase the participation of persons with disabilities in public life.

37. **Mr. Behzad** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the State party had taken a number of steps to prohibit child labour, such as ratifying the International Labour Organization (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182). Ad hoc inspections were carried out by the General Directorate for Labour Inspection to ensure compliance with the Convention and other relevant national laws. In the event of non-compliance, inspectors issued notifications to the employers in question. If employers continued to act in breach of the law, legal action was taken. The courts acted independently and imposed penalties based on inspectors' findings. A national action plan was being carried out to ensure that children worked under decent conditions. Training workshops had been held with the participation of NGOs, relevant social institutions and experts in the field. The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare had recently organized photography exhibitions to promote a culture of creativity among children.

38. **Mr. Mohades** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the articles governing child marriage in the Civil Code could be revised, as had been done previously, although no steps had yet been taken to do so. Under the Islamic Penal Code, a person could be imprisoned for up to 2 years in the event of non-registration of marriage and divorce. Although it was true that women were required by law to wear a hijab, the punishment for violating such laws did not involve flogging. Those in breach of the law merely received a fine.

39. The State party agreed that public executions witnessed by children had a negative impact on their mental well-being. Although it was rare for children to witness such events, efforts had been made to increase awareness that children ought not to be brought to public executions. In addition, the timings of executions had been changed so that they took place before sunrise, when most children were asleep.

40. A child under the age of 2 years was not separated from his or her mother in the event of the mother's imprisonment. However, the mother could choose not to take her child with her to prison. Nurseries had been established within female prisons for children over the age of 2 years; the full-time custody of such children fell to the father in most cases. If the father was deemed unfit to take care of the child, State welfare organizations would take responsibility for the child's guardianship.

41. The practice of honour killings had its roots in Iranian tribal culture. The Government was endeavouring to prevent the practice by engaging in discussions with tribal leaders and, thanks to increasing awareness of the issue, the practice was becoming rarer

42. On the question on child custody, if one parent died, the custody of the child in question would be handed to the remaining living parent. In cases of divorce, children up to the age of 8 years remained with their mother. For children over 8 years of age, the father would be entitled to custody; once children reached puberty, they could choose with which parent they wished to live.

43. Under sharia law, if an inheritance was to be divided between a son and daughter, the son would receive double the inheritance of the daughter owing to the fact that when a woman married, all the financial costs she incurred were borne by her husband.

44. **Ms. Farahmand Pour** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the Sixth Development Plan would be implemented from 2016. The plan would allocate an

increase in the budget for previously under-resourced provinces. Progress had already been made in that regard: for instance, the number of sports facilities available to children in the province of Kermanshah was higher than that of Tehran.

45. **Mr. Abbasi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the Government was cooperating with Interpol and other relevant stakeholders to combat human trafficking and the trafficking of organs. No clear statistics regarding the issue were available at present. Transplants of organs donated by persons of non-Iranian nationality were prohibited.

46. **Ms. Winter** said that the State party had made significant progress in the field of health and education, which was particularly impressive given the country's difficult financial situation in recent years. However, she remained concerned by a number of legal issues and by discrimination within Iran.

47. **Mr. Abbasi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the sanctions imposed on Iran had undoubtedly impacted negatively on children and on the enjoyment of their rights. In view of recent positive developments, however, the Government trusted that the sanctions would be removed as soon as possible. He assured the Committee that its recommendations would be taken into account.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.

United Nations CRC/C/SR.2058

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Distr.: General
15 January 2016

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child
Seventy-first session

Summary record of the 2058th (Chamber A) meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 12 January 2016, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Aldoseri

Contents

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third to fifth periodic reports of Latvia

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third to fifth periodic reports of Latvia (CRC/C/LVA/3-5; CRC/C/LVA/Q/3-5 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Latvia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia), introducing her country's combined third to fifth periodic reports (CRC/C/LVA/3-5), said that considerable efforts had been made to eradicate child poverty and promote maternal and infant health over the past 10 years. Financial allowances targeted at families, which had been reduced during the global economic crisis, had been restored to their pre-crisis levels and State-subsidized childcare had been made available to families with the aim of improving living standards for children and fostering a healthier work-life balance for working parents. Specific measures, including the introduction of the Maintenance Guarantee Fund, had also been introduced to support single-parent families.

3. The Government had recently strengthened national child protection legislation and had adopted a preventive rather than punitive approach to children who exhibited antisocial behaviour. It had also established a national inspectorate for the protection of children's rights to ensure respect for the rights of the child. Similarly, steps had been taken to compile annual reports regarding the overall national implementation of the Convention and to consult with civil society organizations on matters involving children's rights and well-being.

4. **Mr. Guráň** (Country Rapporteur) asked what steps had been taken to ensure the de facto implementation of national legislation aimed at protecting and promoting the rights of the child, including through the use of by-laws. He also wished to know whether the State party intended to establish a State monitoring body responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Convention and whether it would develop a comprehensive national programme promoting children's rights.

5. Additional information regarding the mandate and resources allocated to the three employees working in the area of children's rights within the Ombudsman's Office would be welcome, including whether they could receive complaints from children directly. In that connection, he asked whether awareness-raising and training activities on the Committee's general comment No. 12 (2009) on the right of the child to be heard had been held for professionals working with children and whether the State party intended to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure. Lastly, he wished to know what steps had been taken to involve NGOs in the drafting of the report and the implementation of the Convention.

6. **Mr. Gastaud** (Country Rapporteur) asked what steps had been taken to combat discrimination against children belonging to minority groups, children with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children and to prosecute those responsible. He also wished to know whether national information campaigns had been conducted to raise awareness of the principle of the best interests of the child and whether the opinions of children were taken into account in decisions affecting their lives.

7. Concerning reports of mass media campaigns promoting the use of whipping as an acceptable method of disciplining a child, he asked what steps had been taken to prevent corporal punishment in all settings and to prosecute acts of violence against children. Information on measures adopted to prevent suicide and accidents among

children, such as drowning and traffic accidents, would also be welcome. Lastly, he wished to know what efforts had been made to combat child prostitution and raise awareness of national legislation that restricted the dissemination of pornography.

8. **Ms. Sandberg** asked whether the Government intended to collect disaggregated data on a wider range of issues for all categories of child, including children with mental health issues and child victims of violence.

9. **Ms. Aho Assouma** said that she would like further clarification of the birth registration process, including additional information on the measures taken to ensure the timely registration of refugee children born in the country. She also wished to know whether parents who failed to register the birth of their children within the mandatory one-month deadline were subject to sanctions.

The meeting was suspended at 3.35 p.m. and resumed at 3.55 p.m.

10. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) explained that the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child was an umbrella instrument, which was implemented through subsidiary legislation pertaining to specific sectors. The statistical data annexed to the State party's report (CRC/C/LVA/3-5) and to its replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/LVA/Q/3-5/Add.1) contained information on administrative violations of the law examined by the State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights (SIPCR) under the Latvian Administrative Violations Code. A government agency had been set up to monitor compliance with those laws.

11. **Mr. Guráň** asked for details of the competence and membership of that agency.

12. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the agency, the SIPCR, could not only monitor compliance with the law on the rights of the child, but also impose fines for any breaches thereof. Its wide-ranging duties also included providing input to policy designed to secure those rights and ensuring that educational programmes were in line with the Convention.

13. **Mr. Gastaud** asked whether the fines imposed by the Inspectorate were of an administrative or criminal nature. He wished to know whether, if a child, or his or her parents or guardian, considered that the law had been flouted, they could refer the matter to the Inspectorate.

14. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) replied that the Inspectorate, which could receive complaints from all parties, including children, must inform the police of any complaints concerning criminal offences. It could impose only administrative fines, since criminal fines could be imposed solely by the courts.

15. As the "Latvia Fit for Children" Guidelines would be expiring in 2016, the delegation was looking forward to receiving the Committee's recommendations regarding matters which should be covered in a forthcoming strategy to improve the situation of children in Latvia. The Government had approved the conducting of a survey on their current situation. The Ministry of Welfare was politically responsible for coordinating the activities of institutions to promote and protect children's rights and child welfare.

16. **Ms. Freimane** (Latvia) drew attention to the information on the Ombudsman's Office provided in paragraphs 32 to 38 of the State party's combined third to fifth periodic reports. Four lawyers were currently employed in the Children's Rights Division. In 2015 the Ombudsman's Office had been accredited with A status by the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (ICC), which meant that its operations fully complied with the Paris Principles. In 2015, the Office had received some 600 complaints, a drop of 14 per cent compared with the previous year, when new regulations had

entered into force. Of those complaints, 95 had concerned the right of a child to a family environment and 40 had been filed in connection with issues relating to orphans and children without parental care.

17. In 2014 the Office had issued recommendations to State educational institutions concerning compliance with child safety regulations. In the same year it had given its opinion on a number of questions relating to orphans and it had participated in the drafting of several regulations and amendments thereto. It had exercised its constitutional right to lodge complaints with the Constitutional Court and had actively promoted public awareness of the rights of the child by commissioning a revised translation of the Convention into Latvian.

18. The Office had actively participated in international forums by providing the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (CRIN) with information on several occasions. Three priorities had been set for 2015: to promote children's rights at the municipal level, with the focus on pre-school and primary school-aged children; to promote children's right of access to parents in prison, and to improve the quality of technical facilities to enhance the mobility of children with disabilities.

19. **Mr. Guráň** requested information about the procedure for dealing with complaints from or on behalf of children, as well as on the number and the outcome thereof.

20. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that, since all children were entitled to a place in a kindergarten as from the age of 18 months and since primary school education was compulsory as from the age of 5, the monitoring of early childhood took place through the educational institutions. Every person who had contact with children, including members of the police, judges and prosecutors, had to attend a 40-hour mandatory training course in the rights of the child, the curriculum of which was put together by the SIPCR Inspectorate and constantly updated in line with new legislation.

21. **Ms. Līce** (Latvia) said that it had been decided to combine several periodic reports covering a longish period in order to supply the maximum amount of information on developments since the previous report. Submission of the combined report had been delayed by staff reductions in government services due to the economic crisis. Many of the NGOs listed in paragraph 3 of the State party's report had commented on the draft report and, whenever possible, those comments had been incorporated in the final report, where an effort had been made to balance government views and NGO concerns. The Government intended to ensure greater NGO involvement in future. Consideration was being given to how best to improve and speed up the dissemination of the Committee's concluding observations. The contents of the Committee's general comments were integrated into the relevant training and educational curricula as a guide to how international human rights standards should be realized in domestic legislation and practice. Several judgments of the European Court of Human Rights which had referred to the Committee's general comments in cases concerning Latvia were a further source of instruction for persons in the legal profession. Latvia had already acceded to the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and was considering accession to other international instruments providing for individual complaints procedures. The European Court of Human Rights could, however, examine applications related to the rights of the child, thus ensuring that those rights were effectively monitored.

22. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that NGOs could peruse all cabinet documents, since they had to be published on the government website. Cabinet meetings were public and broadcast via the website. For that reason, anyone who wished to submit their views on any document could do so directly to the relevant minister.

23. **Ms. Kleinberga** (Latvia) said the Government of Latvia was fully committed to eliminating discrimination against vulnerable groups. To that end, legislation had been passed to give effect to the principle of non-discrimination. Guidelines on an integration policy which would be in force until 2018 had been approved. Those guidelines had identified several areas of action to combat discrimination and to promote skills in intercultural dialogue in the field of education. There were plans to develop monitoring and evaluation and to introduce public information measures and training of professionals as a means of ensuring non-discrimination. Several advisory bodies had been set up in order to ensure close cooperation with civil society and with representatives of various ethnic minorities, including the Roma. Provision had been made in the State budget for that purpose. Local authorities were instrumental in meeting the specific needs of families resident in their area. Some successful projects were likewise being run with civil society organizations to combat discrimination against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children.

24. **Mr. Gastaud** asked how many perpetrators of discriminatory acts had actually been prosecuted and convicted between 2007 and 2015.

25. **Mr. Guráň** wished to know if there was a special programme to combat discrimination against the Russian-speaking minority in the field of education.

26. **Ms. Smiltēna** (Latvia) said that, while the delegation did not have the statistics requested by the Committee on the implementation of the Criminal Law in cases of discrimination at hand, it would endeavour to provide them at the next meeting.

27. **Ms. Arkle** (Latvia) said that student governments were important in schools and that each school had its own active, autonomous student government structure. Six regional and international conferences had been organized in the past three years in order to promote multicultural education and to foster an inclusive and tolerant environment. There were two kinds of education programmes in Latvia, namely those mainly taught in the Latvian language and those taught in one of a number of minority languages. There were a large number of Russian schools in the State, as well as schools catering to the Polish, Belarusian and Jewish communities. All schools in the State were required to comply with the same standards. Over the last five years it was clear from statistical data that examination results in the minority schools were often even better than those in the Latvian language schools. The education system was thus diverse and multicultural and was working very successfully to cater for the different communities present in the State.

28. **Mr. Gastaud** said that, in relation to the student governments, the Committee would like to request further information on the debate process which took place in schools. Were suggestions arising from the debates received by the Ministry of Education and, if so, how were they dealt with?

29. **Ms. Arkle** (Latvia) said that the student government structures worked closely with teachers, parents and students to discuss and address any issues.

30. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the focus of the debate process was on qualitative participation in different events and procedures in schools and on the everyday organization of life in schools, including leisure activities. On the subject of the right to life and suicide, the numbers of suicides peaked during the Christmas period, perhaps because children felt lonely at that time of year. Budgetary resources had already been allocated to tackle that issue. In the previous year, during a period of nine months, 46,000 calls had been made to an anonymous, 24-hour helpline, which provided psychological support to those considering suicide. Data were collected from those phone calls and used to produce more effective public information campaigns on issues such as violence in schools. On the subject of drowning it was important to note that Latvia had a very short summer and therefore a limited swimming season.

Campaigns were carried out each year, before the summer, to encourage people to use only officially accredited swimming locations. There had also been a similar campaign to prevent accidents on railway tracks, including an advertisement shown on primetime television. The number of accidents had decreased as a result of the campaign.

31. **Mr. Gastaud** said that he would like to know if awareness raising campaigns on safe swimming were conducted throughout the year in schools or only during the summer. Were there sufficient human resources available to deploy qualified lifeguards to as many locations as possible during the swimming season?

32. **Ms. Feldmane** (Latvia) said that regulations were in place to guarantee the safety of maintained swimming locations. The Health Inspectorate also worked with local municipalities to increase the number of such locations. Many campaigns were organized to provide information on safe behaviour and safe swimming practices. Efforts were also being made to increase swimming classes in schools.

33. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia), turning to the question of the opinion of the child in court cases, said that it was always taken into consideration. The relevant legislation had been fully implemented and was applied in all cases.

34. **Mr. Gastaud** asked from what age it was obligatory to take into account the opinion of the child and if that age varied according to the particular context and proceedings.

35. **Ms. Smiltēna** (Latvia) said that the minimum age was 15 years, however, depending on the maturity of the children, their opinion could potentially be taken into account before that age.

36. **Mr. Guráň** said that the age specified by the delegation did not comply with the Committee's general comment No. 12 and suggested that the State party take the Committee's recommendations into account and implement them in their legislation.

37. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) said that the law in Latvia made it clear that, if a child's opinion was understandable and coherent, it must be heard. If it was possible to find out the child's opinion, even if the child was under 15 years of age, then the court must do so. In cases of adoption, the age from which it was obligatory to do so was 12 years.

38. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia), speaking in reference to the question on prosecution and criminal offences, said that in 2012 the Government had tasked the Ministry of Justice with developing a report on the experience of other countries in tackling prostitution. The main conclusions of the report were that the curricula should be improved in Latvia; informative events should be organized; collaboration with civil society should be strengthened and training should be provided to law enforcement officers with a view to reducing prostitution. In 2013 the Ministry had been tasked with setting up an interinstitutional working group and drawing up a legal regulation to prohibit the purchase of sexual services in Latvia. The report produced by the group had been submitted to the Government. It had been adopted and all necessary legal regulations were in place. Efforts had also been made to transpose Directive 2011/92/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council into domestic legislation, including through an amendment to the Criminal Law, in section 164 on the involvement of persons in prostitution.

39. In addition, criminal liability for prostitution of minors had been introduced and a cabinet regulation had been drawn up to prohibit the prostitution of minors. There was close cooperation between a range of stakeholders, including the municipal police, NGOs and the state police, to share information and identify suspicious persons, as well as to strengthen the protection of victims of trafficking and minors.

According to the information received by the Government from those parties, there were no minors involved in street prostitution in Latvia. A special unit within the State police was dedicated to fighting human trafficking and pimping, as well as organized prostitution. Five minor victims had been identified in the last year and five suspects detained, four of them men. In addition, a range of human rights issues, including child trafficking, pornography and prostitution, were included in the school curricula in Latvia, with the aim of supporting young people in developing the ability to deal with those problems. Young people were also encouraged to exercise caution when sharing personal information online.

40. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) said that corporal punishment was looked upon as physical violence against the child. According to its severity, it could be covered either by chapter 172 of the Administrative Violations Code, which prohibited physical and emotional violence, or by article 174 of the Criminal Law, for very serious cases. There had been an average of around 100 cases of the less serious variety recorded each year, and 30 to 50 more serious cases. In many cases the proceedings had been initiated through calls made by children to the helpline.

41. **The Chair** asked whether corporal punishment was criminalized in different settings such as in private homes, as well as in schools.

42. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) confirmed that was indeed the case.

43. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked whether domestic legislation made it obligatory for an individual to report cases of violence against children to the authorities and requested further information on the environment in which a child was accommodated when they went to a police station.

44. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) said that the child could report violence and when calling the helpline did not have to provide evidence to prove the allegations. The police took the necessary steps to gather evidence and verify the allegations.

45. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that a figure of 63,750 calls received by the helpline was given in the replies to the list of issues and yet there had been only 100 court cases. He would like clarification from the delegation on the reasons for the discrepancy.

46. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the objective of the helpline was to provide psychological support and to build trust. Individuals could call anonymously and, although they would be provided with the necessary information to lodge a complaint subsequently, might choose not to do so. Imposing an obligation on callers to reveal their identity would damage the trust built up between the parties and would thus be counterproductive. However, in time it was expected that more complaints would be lodged, as trust in the institution increased. Freedom of association could be fully exercised in Latvia as long as it was not violent or damaging to society. Latvia had a strong tradition of freedom of association, as reflected in the State's Constitution. The dissemination of child pornography was criminalized in Latvia, including its possession.

47. **Ms. Stabiņa** (Latvia) said that section 166 of the Criminal Law prohibited the import, production and distribution of child pornography. In that regard, in 2014 there had been three minor victims, while in 2015 there had been as many as 20. The State police had a unit dedicated to fighting cybercrime, which collaborated with NGOs and international law enforcement agencies to shut down websites which disseminated that type of pornographic material.

48. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the Ministry of Welfare had developed a new system, one of the first in Europe, to aggregate data from different fields, including data on the number of children suffering from violence or experiencing depression.

While the quality of the data could still be improved, a great deal of useful information had already been registered in the system. Not all the data had been shown online, but it was planned to do so in the future. Regarding the issue of birth certificates, there were two main reasons why parents might not register a birth. The first was simply negligence. It was difficult to understand why that was the case given the generous benefits granted for newborn children, including the birth grant. In addition, all social services in Latvia were linked to the birth certificate, so that it was essential for parents to register a birth in order to access those services. A period of one month was allowed for parents to register births and by the end of that period 99 per cent of births had normally been registered.

49. If newborn infants were abandoned in hospitals, it was incumbent on hospital staff to name and register them. All births that took place in the country, including to refugees and women belonging to minority groups, were subject to registration.

50. **Ms. Aho Assouma** asked what steps were taken in cases where children remained unregistered a month after birth. She asked for further information on the citizenship status of children born in the country to non-citizen parents.

51. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that amendments to the Citizenship Law had resulted in a decrease in the number of non-citizens, which in 2015 had stood at 12 per cent of the population. Under that Law, children born in the country to stateless or non-citizen parents were granted citizenship if their parents made a request during birth registration.

52. **Mr. Guráň** requested profile data on the mothers who abandoned their newborns in hospitals. He wondered whether many of those women were from the Roma community, as was the case in some other countries.

53. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked whether budgets were allocated within various ministries for the implementation of the Convention and whether such information was available to the national audit office in order to monitor spending.

54. **Mr. Gastaud** asked whether baby hatches, where parents could leave their unwanted children, were available in the country. He asked whether a child's right to privacy was respected, particularly by the media during court proceedings.

55. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that most of the women who abandoned their newborns in hospitals were single mothers who already had children and did not necessarily belong to any ethnic minority group. Budget allocations for programmes related to the Convention, particularly child protection campaigns and education initiatives, were all audited and monitored.

56. **Ms. Līce** (Latvia) said that the right to privacy and victim protection were hotly debated issues in Latvian society. Meetings were held with media agencies and journalists to raise awareness of legislation on data and victim protection, freedom of information and the rights of the child, and a centre for media excellence had been established to promote quality ethical reporting.

57. **Mr. Guráň** asked what measures were taken to provide support for children in alternative family care and raise awareness of foster care. He would like further information about the living conditions of children residing in boarding schools and rehabilitation programmes for young people leaving institutional care settings. He asked what was done to provide psychological support to the large number of children left behind while their parents sought employment abroad. He requested details on inclusive education for children with disabilities, teacher training in the field of inclusive education, and the criteria used for disability diagnoses of children.

58. **Mr. Gastaud** asked what plans had been made to improve the quality of teacher training and education, especially in rural areas. He wished to know what measures were taken or envisaged in order to increase the enrolment rate and decrease the dropout rate, particularly of girls and in remote areas. Updated information would be appreciated on plans to provide secondary education in the Latvian language only. Had a bill been passed in that respect? Given that under the Labour Law children from the age of 13 were permitted to perform light work, he asked whether a list had been compiled of authorized and prohibited occupations and whether labour inspection visits were carried out on a regular basis to detect apparently widespread contraventions and whether prosecutions were brought. He would also like to know what measures were taken to reduce the number of street children and provide them with support.

59. He expressed concern that the periods of pretrial detention for children in conflict with the law were excessive. He asked which offences were categorized as serious and punishable with a prison sentence of 10 years and whether a sufficient number of criminal judges specialized in juvenile crime. Further information would be appreciated on the living conditions in Cēsis Correctional Institution for Juveniles, which had been undergoing renovations, and asked whether there were similar renovation plans for other juvenile detention centres. What were the results of the reintegration programme for minors in conflict with the law? What was the difference between the two types of detention centres for minors in the State party, and how was the problem of violence among minors in detention centres addressed?

60. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** asked for data regarding the number of children who remained with their parents in prison, why they stayed with their parents until they were 4 years of age, and not 3, and what measures ensured that those children were not discriminated against. She asked whether training provided to children's legal representatives covered domestic legislation on children and the Convention, whether pre-sentencing reports proposed various options and to what extent dependent children were taken into account in criminal sentencing procedures.

61. She asked about the duration of maternity leave, whether the State party had adopted the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, what initiatives had been launched to encourage breastfeeding, and whether projects were carried out under the baby-friendly hospital initiative. She expressed concern at the long waiting times for state medical care that often forced parents to opt for private health care for their children, the insufficiency of the budget provided for adolescent health-care services, and the lack of access to gynaecological care for young people. How did the State party plan to address those situations?

62. **Ms. Aho Assouma** asked what the rates of infant and maternal mortality were in the State party. She wondered whether the budget earmarked for health care was subject to audit, what accounted for the lack of free access for children to health specialists and dentists, what measures were taken to remedy widespread iodine deficiencies and resulting cases of goitre, whether programmes existed to prevent substance use and abuse among young persons, and whether young women had access to safe pregnancy terminations in hospitals. She would like to know the incidence of HIV/AIDS and what was being done to reduce it, what programmes were run to prevent mother-to-child transmission, and what awareness campaigns were conducted regarding antiretroviral therapy. She asked about the rate of suicide, measures to identify and prevent depression in children and young people, and reintegration programmes following depressive episodes. Lastly, she enquired what medical and psychological assistance was provided to child victims of sexual abuse, what type of health care refugees could access, irrespective of whether they were held in reception or detention centres, and what anti-corruption strategies had been devised.

63. **Ms. Sandberg** asked for comments on reports that violence and sexual abuse of children with intellectual disabilities in institutions persisted. How did the authorities ensure that such cases were reported by those children and what measures were taken to prevent violations and assist the victims?

64. **The Chair**, speaking as a member of the Committee, asked whether free telephone helplines, staffed by trained personnel, were available for children. She also asked whether children of asylum seekers in the territory were granted Latvian nationality.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.

United Nations CRC/C/SR.2059

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
14 January 2016

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child
Seventy-first session

Summary record of the 2059th (Chamber B) meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 12 January 2016, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Mezmur

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Combined third and fourth periodic reports of Oman

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third and fourth periodic reports of Oman (CRC/C/OMN/3-4; CRC/C/OMN/Q/3-4 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Oman took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman), introducing the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Oman, said that respect for human rights principles, including children's rights, underpinned his country's national policies. A number of significant laws had been enacted in recent years, including the Children's Act, the Juvenile Accountability Act and the Care and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities Act. The Ministry of Social Development was responsible for implementing the international conventions to which Oman was a party insofar as they concerned women, children and persons with disabilities. Oman was taking measures to promote children's rights in all areas. For example, the child mortality rate had fallen from 9.8 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2013 to 7.9 in 2014 and the school enrolment rate across public and private schools had reached 96 per cent in 2013/14. The written replies to the list of issues contained a number of updated indicators attesting to other progress made.

3. The implementation of the Convention and its optional protocols was a priority for the Government, which had chalked up a number of important achievements in the past five years. For instance, Oman had withdrawn four of its five reservations to the Convention; its remaining reservation applied only to article 14, paragraph 1, on freedom of religion, and did not infringe on the rights of persons living in Oman to choose their religion. The Government had made particular efforts to implement the recommendations made by the Committee in its previous concluding observations and by other treaty bodies concerning the rights of children with disabilities. At the first national conference on childhood, held in February 2013, progress had been reviewed, strategic national priorities for childhood and the provisions of the future Children's Act had been discussed, and the combined third and fourth periodic reports had been adopted. Children had discussed matters of interest to them in parallel workshops and children's representatives had participated in all the meetings during the conference. Civil society organizations had participated in the conference, the preparation of the State party report, and the drafting of the Children's Act and the National Strategy for Childhood.

4. The Children's Act, which had been published in Arabic and English, had been disseminated among the relevant ministries, government bodies and international and regional organizations, and a range of awareness-raising activities had been conducted through the media. After consultation, a list of implementation measures for the Act had been drawn up. Work was under way on the National Strategy for Childhood, 2016-2027. The role of the National Committee for Family Affairs had been strengthened and the necessary funds assigned, and a technical secretariat had been appointed to oversee its functioning. The powers of the Follow-Up Committee on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, composed of 24 experts from the ministries and civil society responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Convention and its optional protocols, had also been strengthened. The two committees cooperated closely and conducted joint projects on children's issues.

5. Pursuant to the Children's Act, the mechanism for dealing with child protection issues, including abuse in the home and child abandonment, had been reviewed; in 2015, commissions for the protection of children from abuse had been established in each governorate. In cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

office in Oman, the Ministry of Social Development had launched a training programme for government staff working in the area of children's rights. In 2015, a handbook for children who were the victims of violence or abuse in the home had been published and circulated to child protection professionals. A toll-free telephone line had been set up to receive complaints on child protection matters and a series of visits to other Gulf and Arab States had been organized to share good practices in that area. Significant progress had thus been made in developing a robust child protection system.

6. Great importance was attached to early childhood development, and programmes had been established to evaluate, improve and promote childcare facilities and kindergartens and enhance training for childcare professionals. A national forum was planned for 2016 to discuss how to strengthen the role of early childhood facilities and increase the number of children attending them. Although the phenomenon of children deprived of a family environment was not widespread, programmes were in place to find alternative care for them, including in provincial centres, and to integrate them into society. Efforts were made to facilitate visits by children to parents in prison. Cultural projects and programmes were also being implemented, and a forum had recently been held on developing cultural services for children. There were plans to set up a number of childhood cultural centres — the first had already been opened in Nizwa — and publish special magazines for children. The Government strove to support parents in the education of their children through programmes to provide guidance to young married couples. The General Directorate of Family Development conducted awareness-raising campaigns and consultations on family affairs and a toll-free telephone line was available to give advice in that area. Oman was determined to pursue its efforts to support and protect children's rights from a social, psychological and cultural point of view, in conformity with the principle of the best interests of the child.

7. **Mr. Kotrane** (Country Rapporteur) said that Oman had made remarkable progress since its ratification of the Convention through the adoption of several laws to enhance the legal protection of children, including the Children's Act, which provided for a series of measures to promote the situation of children and monitor the implementation of the Convention and its optional protocols. However, the Committee was concerned that Oman had not yet ratified a number of international human rights instruments; it would be interested to know, in particular, whether the State party had any plans to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure. He invited the delegation to comment on the fact that, despite the constitutional provision that international treaties and agreements were part of the law of the country, they did not seem to take precedence over domestic laws. What measures were planned to give clear status to international instruments, including the Convention, and ensure that they did take precedence over national laws? Noting that the Convention had not been directly invoked in the domestic courts, he wondered what efforts were being made to increase awareness of the provisions of the Convention.

8. The Committee welcomed the withdrawal by the State party of its reservations to articles 9, 21 and 30 of the Convention but would be interested to know if it had any plans to withdraw the reservation to article 14, drawing on the experience of several other countries in the region that had done so. Did the State party intend to withdraw its reservations to articles 9 and 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which dealt with equality in marriage and family relations, including all matters relating to children, and equal rights for women and men with respect to the nationality of their children? Expressing concern with regard to the independence of the National Human Rights Commission, he asked what measures were planned to ensure that it complied with the Paris Principles and had the

mandate to receive, investigate and address complaints from the general public, including from children and their parents.

9. Turning to the issue of non-discrimination, he asked whether the State party intended to take any measures — for example, reviewing the requirements contained in article 20 of the Civil Status Act — to eliminate all forms of discrimination against children born out of wedlock and to ensure that such children could avail themselves of all available methods, including DNA testing, to determine their parentage. He also asked what plans the State party had made to ensure that the right of children to preserve their identity, including nationality, name and family relations, was respected, and that mothers could pass Omani nationality on to their children on an equal basis with fathers.

10. The Committee was concerned by the definition of the term "violence" in the Children's Act, as it seemed worded in such a way as to permit the continued administration of corporal punishment in the home. What legislative measures were being considered to ban the corporal punishment of children explicitly and to change public attitudes towards its use?

11. **Ms. Kaazova** (Country Rapporteur) said that she would appreciate clarification of the current status of the National Strategy for Childhood. Had it ultimately been adopted? She wondered how work on children's issues done by such different institutions as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Manpower was coordinated and whether the State party intended to set up a single body to coordinate work on all the issues that fell within the scope of the Convention. She also wondered whether it had any plans to draw up its budgets in such a way as to ensure that the resources earmarked for children's issues could be identified more clearly, a practice that could make it possible to determine whether financing levels and the outcome of any given project were in any way correlated.

12. She was under the impression that the authorities were making considerable efforts to disseminate knowledge of the Children's Act. It would be interesting to know whether similar efforts, in particular in the schools, were being made in respect of the Convention. She asked what was being done to continue combating early marriage, how the principle of the best interests of the child was applied in the State party — in its courts, for example — and how it ensured that children's views were given due weight, particularly in family settings. She also wondered how the authorities reconciled the application of that principle and the situation of the non-Omani children who were prevented from being reunited with their parents.

13. The number of children, particularly those between 15 and 18 years of age, who had died or been injured in road accidents in the State party in recent years was so high as to constitute a violation of the right to life. She asked at what age adolescents could obtain a driver's licence, whether they simply drove without a licence, and what measures the authorities were taking to address the problem, which was made all the more serious by high rates of motor vehicle ownership.

14. It was not clear to her that the definition of violence in the Children's Act was as all-encompassing as that contained in article 19 of the Convention. It appeared not to cover emotional or psychological violence, for example. She would appreciate information on whether the courts had dealt with any cases of sexual abuse of children and, if so, what the results had been, what treatment had been offered to victims and what preventive measures had been taken. In that connection, she asked what was being done to address the problem of the sexual abuse of children in family settings. Victims of such abuse were never prosecuted, were they?

15. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** said that she would appreciate information on the efforts made by the State party to facilitate the provision of birth certificates for children of

migrant workers. She also wished to know exactly what kind of threat to public order and morality would justify a restriction of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and what was being done to halt the gradual erosion of the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, which had accelerated considerably in the wake of the State party's ratification of the Gulf Cooperation Council Security Agreement in early 2013.

The meeting was suspended at 4.05 p.m. and resumed at 4.35 p.m.

16. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that the Ministry of Social Development worked in close cooperation with other public agencies and authorities on issues related to children's rights. The Children's Act, for example, had been drafted by experts working for the Ministry and submitted to UNICEF for comments. It had then been reviewed by the State Council, the Shura Council and law-making bodies. The entire process had been one of lengthy debate. It had been a considerable accomplishment, however, not least because it had led to the establishment of a body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention throughout the country.

17. **Mr. Al Hinai** (Oman) said that there were national mechanisms, including the toll-free helpline 1100, for reporting ill-treatment and abuse. Hospitals reported cases of ill-treatment and abuse to the police, the Public Prosecution Service and the Family Protection Department. In addition, under the Children's Act, teachers and other adults working with children were required by law to report child abuse.

18. The Ministry of Social Development made efforts to disseminate knowledge of the Convention in cooperation with a number of stakeholders. The support of NGOs and the media was enlisted, and the Ministry held yearly workshops to discuss domestic law, of which the Convention was an integral part.

19. The National Committee for Family Affairs developed national policies and defined strategies. The Follow-up Committee, for its part, was responsible for implementing the Convention, coordinating efforts to bring the country's laws into line with the Convention and making recommendations to the National Committee for Family Affairs.

20. Under the Children's Act, all births had to be recorded, and the Ministry of Health and the Civil Status Department had to be notified. Ratification of the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure would depend on a number of factors, including the resources available to the country.

21. **Ms. Al Habsi** (Oman) said that, since 2010, the Ministry of Education had been working with UNICEF and civil society organizations to incorporate a human rights perspective in all primary and secondary school materials. As a result, children were now introduced to the rights and principles enshrined in the Convention from 6 years of age onwards and teachers were encouraged to organize excursions and activities which developed their awareness further. The Ministry had also recently launched a child-friendly schools initiative that established national parameters and guidelines and was designed to foster social participation in child-friendly programmes and healthy interaction between schools and the wider community. The aim was to disseminate knowledge of the Convention throughout the country. To that end, a national team had been set up to deliver training and the programme was currently being rolled out in five governorates, including, in addition to Muscat, the remote Governorate of Dhofar, chosen specifically because of its less accessible geography and lower level of development. New manuals had been developed to support the initiative, including a cartoon-based guidebook for children, entitled *I Know My Rights*, published in 2015.

22. **Ms. Al Hatmi** (Oman) said that the Government was engaged in a far-reaching initiative, involving various ministries, the police force, the private sector and civil society, to identify the causes of the large number of road traffic accidents in Oman and develop plans and policies to reduce their frequency. To date, its efforts had included road safety awareness-raising campaigns, training programmes for children and adults, the development of new guidelines and manuals designed specifically for use in schools, the establishment of a dedicated road safety centre and the designation of an annual road safety day. The initiative was ongoing but had already yielded tangible results, significantly reducing both the number of accidents and the number of fatalities.

23. **Ms. Al Bulushi** said that, pursuant to article 76 and article 80 of the Constitution, international treaties had the force of law once ratified and State bodies were prohibited from issuing rules, regulations or instructions that contravened their provisions. The Government therefore accorded great importance to the alignment of national and international laws. The Children's Act, for example, enshrined all the rights and principles established in the Convention.

24. As in the case of all reservations to international instruments, the possibility of withdrawing the reservation to the provisions of the Convention that gave children the right to freedom of religion would need to be assessed carefully by the State's legislative institutions, in consultation with civil society organizations, prior to any decision. Such decisions took time but the possibility would be duly considered. The possibility of ratifying other international instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, was also on the agenda.

25. The Constitution established that all citizens were equal and outlawed discrimination on any grounds. Accordingly, there was no discrimination against children born out of wedlock, who enjoyed full nationality and citizenship rights, or against children with disabilities, who benefited from wide-ranging rehabilitation and protection measures. Discrimination was also expressly outlawed in the Children's Act.

26. The principle of the best interests of the child was amply reflected in national legislation, and had been even before ratification of the Convention. For example, the Labour Act prohibited the employment of children under 15 years of age and barred all minors from potentially hazardous work; women in the private sector were guaranteed 50 days' maternity leave in order to guarantee adequate care for their child immediately before and after birth; juvenile offenders under 16 years of age were subject to the jurisdiction of special police officers and special courts, and were excluded from the death penalty; abandoned children and children with no known parents had the right to a foster family; and social protection measures were in place to prevent such children from being drawn into begging.

27. The question of whether Omani women married to foreign husbands should be permitted to transfer their nationality to their children was a sovereign, internal issue. Under Omani law, citizenship could be transferred through the father only; children born to a non-Omani man therefore took their father's nationality. However, children born to an Omani woman in Oman had the right to citizenship if their father was unknown and all children born in Oman had access to all social services, irrespective of their nationality.

28. **Ms. Khazova** asked whether the committee responsible for implementing the Convention might accurately be described as a national monitoring and coordinating body and whether it was responsible for overseeing all children's rights. Referring to

the State party's commendable awareness-raising efforts, she asked whether it could reasonably be assumed that all Omani children were now familiar with the Convention, including those living in remote rural areas, or whether certain regions were yet to benefit from or had been only partly covered by the campaign. She would also like to know how the authorities dealt with complaints of domestic violence submitted by children through the relevant telephone helpline.

29. **Mr. Kotrane** said that, while he acknowledged the State party's efforts to facilitate access to citizenship, the prerequisites for citizenship should be the same for all children with at least one Omani parent. Highlighting the progress achieved in that area in Algeria and Tunisia, where all children born to a father or mother who was a national of the country automatically obtained nationality, he urged the State party to address the discrimination still inherent in its citizenship laws.

30. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said it was hoped that the committee responsible for implementing the Convention would, once fully operational, have representatives and working groups active throughout the country. Although he was unable to confirm that all Omani children were aware of their rights under the Convention, the booklets developed in cooperation with UNICEF had been issued to all schoolchildren between 6 and 18 years of age, which, he believed, was a major achievement.

31. **Ms. Al Habsi** (Oman) said that numerous educational activities and campaigns to raise awareness of the rights of the child had been organized in recent years. Specific events had included workshops and seminars, as well as radio, television, newspaper and social media campaigns. Over 5,000 girls and boys had participated in such events, which had been run by schools, mosques and civil society organizations as well as by State bodies.

32. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that a large number of NGOs were active in Oman, including around 60 women's organizations which had an important role in promoting children's rights and guaranteeing favourable conditions for their development. The NGO ranks included organizations dedicated to supporting children with blood diseases, promoting road safety, organizing cultural activities and improving educational opportunities.

33. Although the Government had had little or no information and communications technology resources to support its awareness-raising and dissemination efforts at the time of ratification, efficient and effective use of new technologies had since become central to those efforts. The authorities endeavoured to place the most appropriate technologies at the disposal of all citizens, including children, and had incorporated the use of laptops and tablets, inter alia, into educational curricula. Technology was also deployed to good effect within the court system.

34. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that children were legally permitted to establish associations for peaceful purposes, provided that those associations were not at variance with national law. Children were also entitled to participate in cultural activities, such as scout groups, in both public and private schools.

35. **Ms. Al Habsi** (Oman) said that a standard school curriculum was taught in all schools throughout the country. All children, including those living in remote areas, were educated about the Convention as it was part of that curriculum.

36. **Ms. Al Hatmi** (Oman) said that more than 99 per cent of pregnant women had access to health-care facilities. Therefore, the vast majority of births took place within those facilities, and documentation on all such births was sent to the relevant authorities. If the birth had not yet been registered within a given time frame, follow-up measures were taken. Clear policies on birth registration had been established and were being implemented by the Ministry of Health.

37. **Mr. Al Hinai** (Oman) said that, while there was an independent monitoring mechanism in place to monitor the work of all public institutions, the role of the Follow-up Committee on Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child was one of coordination and follow-up rather than monitoring. Direct action was taken in the event of a complaint of violence against a child. Care was provided for the child, and rehabilitation measures targeting the child's family members were also taken.

38. **Ms. Al Yazidy** (Oman) said that child abuse was defined in the Children's Act as the premeditated physical, psychological or sexual abuse of a child or a failure on the part of persons responsible for the child to act to prevent such abuse. Children enjoyed the right to information, including through the use of information and communications technology. Intellectual property laws did not impose any minimum age limit, which meant that children had the same intellectual property rights as adults. Children also enjoyed freedom of expression, including in rehabilitation centres and in institutional care settings, provided that what they expressed did not violate public order and morals.

39. The legal age of marriage was 18 years in Oman, and less than 1 per cent of marriages involved persons under that age. The average age of marriage was 26 years for women and 29 years for men. A number of ongoing programmes highlighted the negative effects of early marriage.

40. **Mr. Al Rahbi** (Oman) said that Oman was the only country in the Middle East that had accepted a visit by the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. Unfortunately, the Special Rapporteur had gone beyond the scope of his mandate, and the press release on his visit had been prepared even before the visit had taken place. The Special Rapporteur had not met with any of the women's associations, journalists' associations or trade unions in the country, and many of the comments made by the State authorities during the visit had not been taken into account in the visit report. He found it regrettable that the report had not been more balanced.

41. The National Human Rights Committee had only recently been established. While it had been granted B-status by the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, he was hopeful that in the future it would achieve A-status and would become a very effective institution. Indeed, it already performed all the roles required of A-status institutions.

42. **Ms. Khazova**, while commending the State party on the efforts it had made in the area of child protection, said that she wished to know more about the criteria used when deciding whether to remove children from their families. She asked whether any counselling was provided to families in difficult situations with a view to avoiding the removal of the child from the family.

43. She was very concerned about the fate of children born out of wedlock, who were reportedly often abandoned by their mothers out of fear of criminal punishment. She wished to know what kind of care settings those children were placed in and whether they could maintain links with their biological mother and other relatives. She requested further information about the monitoring of foster homes and alternative care facilities and the steps taken in the event of a violation of the rights of children in such care. She asked to what extent the care provided in foster homes and alternative care settings prepared children to live as independent adults.

44. She wished to know the fate of children whose parents were in prison and whether they were allowed to maintain contact with those parents. She also asked about the fate of children born in prison to incarcerated women.

45. She would be grateful for information on the mental health services available to children suffering from depression or other mental health problems. She wondered how behavioural problems exhibited by children were handled in the State party. Lastly, she asked whether it was true that there was no legal framework for conducting proper age assessments of refugees and asylum seekers and for ensuring their access to education and health services.

46. **Mr. Kotrane** asked why the obligation to report violence against children applied only to professionals working with children and not to the general public. He remained concerned that some provisions of the Personal Status Act were not in the best interests of the child, such as the provision that disallowed guardianship if the parent was of a different religion than the child. He encouraged the State party to review the provisions stipulating which family members should be granted custody or guardianship in the event of a separation. It appeared that, while either parent could be granted custody, only the father could be granted guardianship. Noting that the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had previously expressed concern about discriminatory provisions in the Act, he asked whether the State party was considering amending those provisions.

47. Although some reforms had been made to the juvenile justice system, shortcomings still remained, such as the low age of criminal responsibility, which still stood at 9 years in the State party. He wished to know what measures were being taken to speed up the process of raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12 years.

48. **Ms. Oviedo Fierro** said that, given the excellent care provided to pregnant women in the State party, it seemed counterproductive to then provide only 50 days of maternity leave. She asked whether the Government was considering once again mandating three months of maternity leave, as it had done in the past.

49. She asked whether it was true that breastfeeding breaks were being eliminated, and she wished to know how the State party was implementing the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes. She would like the delegation to comment on reports of water contamination caused by the oil industry.

50. While commending the many improvements in the quality of health care, she was concerned that those improvements might not have reached some of the more remote parts of the country, and that children and adolescents in those areas might consequently suffer from health problems such as diarrhoea and anaemia. She was also concerned about the maternal mortality rate in some remote areas.

51. The data provided on adolescent health were rather outdated. She therefore wished to know whether the educational programmes on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases were still being carried out and whether mental health concerns among adolescents were being addressed. She also wished to know more about the sexual and reproductive health services provided in the State party.

52. **Mr. Nelson** said he was concerned by the fact that children who were forced into begging by their caregivers were being arrested and even detained for short periods. He asked what measures were being taken to address the problem of children begging in the streets.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.

United Nations CRC/C/SR.2060

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
15 January 2016

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child
Seventy-first session

Summary record of the 2060th (Chamber A) meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 13 January 2016, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Aldoseri

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third to fifth periodic reports of Latvia (continued) (CRC/C/LVA/3-5; CRC/C/LVA/Q/3-5 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Latvia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia), responding to questions raised earlier, said that in 2014 the Ombudsman's Office had received 672 complaints pertaining to children's rights, none of which had been filed by minors. In 2015, it had received 890, of which 10 had been submitted by minors. Of those 10 complaints, 6 had concerned detention conditions, 2 had concerned custody rights, 1 had concerned family reunification and the other had concerned school enrolment. All complaints had been handled promptly and with particular care.

3. Since 2004, the number of children living in institutions had fallen from 12,000 to around 2,000, and the Government had set an ambitious goal of achieving complete deinstitutionalization within five years. To that end, the State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights had taken steps to increase the number of certified foster parents. Amendments had been made to relevant legislation with a view to introducing a foster care training programme and providing comprehensive support and guidance to caregivers. Each year, the Inspectorate organized a workshop to enable stakeholders to discuss the latest issues.

4. As part of the deinstitutionalization process, the Government was conducting needs assessments in children's institutions and establishing youth homes in line with Swedish best practices. The homes would be suitable for children with special needs and care would be provided by specialized health professionals. It was hoped that plans in that regard would be finalized by the end of 2016, at which point the implementation phase could begin.

5. In March 2015, the Cabinet of Ministers had adopted a concept document on improving the adoption and foster care system. Information on the aims and content of the document was contained in the State party's replies to the list of issues. One of the aims was to encourage foster parents to adopt children with disabilities by offering financial support and other benefits. Amendments had been proposed to the Law on Social Services and Social Assistance to reduce the number of days that children spent in institutions and to enhance the monitoring of foster children by social services and orphans' courts.

6. **Ms. Sandberg**, noting that the word "orphan" was sometimes used by the delegation to denote a child who still had living parents, said that in English it referred exclusively to a child whose parents were dead. She therefore wished to know whether consideration had been given to finding a more appropriate term.

7. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that, in the case of orphans' courts, the word "orphan" had been used for want of a more precise equivalent of the Latvian term for a child who had no legal guardian.

8. **Ms. Aho Assouma** asked whether children who were able to express an opinion were consulted about placement decisions and why the financial support and other benefits given to foster parents who adopted children with disabilities could not instead be given to the children's biological parents.

9. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that children with disabilities who lived with their biological parents were entitled to a disability allowance and to a range of other

benefits that were at least equal to those given to children living with foster parents. The financial support that she had mentioned was simply an incentive for caregivers to adopt children with special needs who would otherwise be placed in an institution. Children were asked for their opinion on placement arrangements, and their views were taken into account by the orphans' courts tasked with monitoring those arrangements.

10. **Mr. Gurán** (Country Rapporteur) said that there were several European foster care models that Latvia could usefully copy, including ones based on professional foster parenting. Complete deinstitutionalization was an unrealistic objective, as some degree of institutional care would always be required. With that in mind, he wished to know how the Government planned to look after children who were removed from institutions in the future.

11. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the number of children living in institutions had fallen by over 80 per cent since 2004 and that a further decrease could reasonably be expected. While drafting the concept document on improving the adoption and foster care system, the Government had considered many options, including professional foster parenting, an approach that had the backing of numerous NGOs.

12. When children with no legal guardian reached the age of 18 years, they were entitled to a one-off payment, study grants and a choice of accommodation. The number of children left behind by parents seeking employment outside the country had decreased from almost 8,000 in 2007 to 300 in January 2016, thanks in part to legislative amendments requiring parents to inform orphans' courts if they intended to leave the country for a period of over three months. In 2013, the Government had adopted a plan to encourage return migration, including through the provision of Latvian language classes in destination countries. In recent surveys, however, less than half of emigrants had expressed a desire to move back.

13. Children sleeping on the streets were either found by the police or reported to the authorities by members of the public. The police also made effective use of social media to locate such children and liaised with social services to ensure that adequate care was provided.

14. **Ms. Sandberg** asked whether baby hatches were used in the State party and, if so, why. Noting that hatches deprived children of their right to preserve their identity, she asked whether the Government had considered alternative arrangements such as confidential births.

15. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that hatches had been introduced to prevent newborns from being abandoned, and it was estimated that around 30 lives had been saved in the previous five years. The Government would take into account the suggestion regarding confidential births.

16. **Ms. Tāre** (Latvia), in response to a question about the economic exploitation of children, drew the Committee's attention to the State party's periodic report and said that, pursuant to the Labour Law, children could be employed in light work for a maximum of 4 hours per day and 20 hours per week. The State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights had an overall duty to monitor the implementation of child labour regulations and to report any violations to the State Labour Inspectorate. In recent years, no violations had been detected.

17. The State Labour Inspectorate carried out numerous prevention activities. It met regularly with children and organized information sessions on labour law and health and safety issues, which were also a component of school curricula. Permits had to be obtained from the State Labour Inspectorate for the employment of children as performers in cultural, artistic, sporting and advertising activities. The Inspectorate

also worked to detect non-registered employment and applied administrative penalties in such cases.

18. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that there were currently no waiting lists for State-funded rehabilitation services for child victims of criminal offences, exploitation, sexual abuse, violence or any other unlawful, cruel or demeaning acts. Those services were of a very high quality and were closely monitored by the Latvian Children's Fund. Children were usually treated at home but, in the most serious cases, they received treatment in an institution.

19. Latvia had a number of private kindergartens, as well as public kindergartens run by municipalities. Certain municipalities chose to buy in services from private education establishments, and State subsidies were provided to help parents cover private kindergarten fees. All private education establishments were certified by the State and had to fulfil certain requirements. There were still kindergarten waiting lists in two municipalities.

20. **Mr. Gurán** asked which languages preschool education was provided in and whether all preschool children, including those from minority groups, were prepared for primary education in the Latvian language.

21. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that parents could choose the language of instruction at preschool level. As well as Latvian-language kindergartens, there were Russian, English and bilingual preschool establishments.

22. **Ms. Arkle** (Latvia) said that teaching was usually conducted in Latvian at primary school level but that some primary schools provided bilingual education.

23. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the working methods applied in institutions for children with intellectual disabilities had been modified significantly in recent years. Children with mild disabilities were prepared for independent living, while those with more severe disabilities were provided with additional support services. All establishments had to report on the quality of their services and were subject to unscheduled visits by State authorities and NGOs, which issued independent assessment reports. In the past, those reports had highlighted concerns related to the way in which children living at the centres spent their free time and, as a result, efforts were being made to introduce more meaningful and productive leisure activities. Special training was provided to staff to prevent violations of children's rights, and severe penalties were applied if such cases were not reported immediately to the Ministry of Welfare or the police. That approach had proven very effective. Every effort was made to ensure the highest standard of care for children with special needs and help them become independent and self-sufficient.

24. With regard to the children's helpline, she emphasized that all helpline operators were highly qualified, received special training and were closely supervised in their work. Over half of the children who used the helpline were between the ages of 12 and 15 years, and the majority were boys. Measures were taken to address the issues reported and trace them back to source in a non-intrusive manner. In response to a question raised by **Mr. Gastaud** (Country Rapporteur), she confirmed that the helpline was accessible throughout the country.

25. **Ms. Arkle** (Latvia) said that significant efforts were made to integrate children with disabilities in mainstream education wherever possible. While children with severe disabilities attended special schools or special boarding schools, most children with special needs were taught in special classes or groups within mainstream establishments. If a child who was enrolled in a mainstream school experienced significant academic difficulties, he or she could be assessed by specialists and support measures proposed. If the child's performance did not subsequently improve,

he or she could be reassessed and seen by the Pedagogic Medical Commission, which would then recommend an appropriate curriculum tailored to the child's needs. Under the General Education Law, schools were responsible for ensuring support measures for children with special needs, and mainstream schools were increasingly adapting their curricula to meet the requirements of such children. In accordance with the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers, the per capita funding allocated to special education should be higher than that for mainstream education.

26. Preschool education was compulsory for children aged between 5 and 6 years, and young children with special needs usually attended mainstream kindergartens. Most preschool establishments were public and were assessed by the State at least once every six years.

27. All schoolteachers were required to have completed professional training at university or college level, and those providing education to children with special needs were expected to complete a special education teacher training programme.

28. Turning to future objectives, she said that there were plans to improve teacher training and raise teaching standards; to prevent school dropouts by ensuring better information-sharing between schools, municipalities and employment services, conducting systematic follow-up with school leavers and offering a broader range of options for returning to education; to reduce the proportion of 18-24 year-olds without secondary education to 10 per cent by 2020; and to reduce the number of special schools and boarding schools.

29. **Ms. Sandberg** asked whether parents of children with special needs were encouraged to send their children to mainstream schools and what kind of information was provided to them in that regard. She wondered whether children with special needs who were enrolled in mainstream schools were placed in separate classes from their peers.

30. **Mr. Gastaud** asked whether there were a sufficient number of special education teachers; whether school buildings were properly equipped to meet the needs of children with disabilities; what was involved in the teacher recruitment process; whether parents were able to choose between public and private education for their children; how public and private education was funded; and what practical measures were being taken to reduce school dropout rates.

31. **Mr. Gurán** asked whether there were any boarding schools for children with behavioural problems that restricted the liberty of those children.

32. **Ms. Arkle** (Latvia) said that parents of children with special needs were encouraged to enrol their children in mainstream education. The issue of closed boarding schools for children with behavioural problems was being discussed and measures were being taken to address concerns in that area. Around 8 per cent of teachers worked in schools and preschools for children with special needs. All municipalities were responsible for ensuring that children within their territory had access to education close to their place of residence and for deciding how funds should be distributed among educational establishments. Targeted support was provided to students and teachers in order to reduce dropout rates, which had fallen in recent years. However, closer cooperation with municipalities and employment services was required. Dropout rates were particularly high among girls in the Roma community.

33. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the majority of young people who dropped out of education were male, so measures to decrease dropout rates focused on boys.

The meeting was suspended at 11.25 a.m. and resumed at 11.40 a.m.

34. **Ms. Papule** (Latvia) said that the Criminal Law set out special provisions for the deprivation of liberty of minors. Minors could not be imprisoned for crimes that were not classed as serious. They could however be imprisoned for up to 2 years for serious non-violent crimes, up to 5 years for serious crimes of a violent nature, and up to 10 years for especially serious crimes. There was currently only one child in Latvia serving the maximum sentence of 10 years for committing a murder under particularly aggravating circumstances. In answer to a question raised by **Mr. Gastaud**, she said that all sentences were prescribed in the Criminal Law and that the judge determined the sentence depending on the specific circumstances of the case.

35. Minors could be placed in social correctional educational establishments. Such establishments offered social rehabilitation programmes and aimed to help minors reintegrate into society. Minors were sent to such institutions on the decision of a judge, although it was not considered a criminal sentence but a compulsory measure of a correctional nature. Minors could also be placed in juvenile correctional institutions, which were detention centres that offered primary and secondary school education in addition to a social correction programme. Minors placed in such establishments had already been sentenced to deprivation of liberty. Responding to a question raised by **Ms. Sandberg**, she said that children between the ages of 11 and 18 years could be placed in social correctional educational establishments, while children aged between 13 and 18 years could be placed in juvenile correctional institutions. However, if offenders were continuing their school education, they could stay in juvenile correctional institutions up to the age of 25 years. In response to a question by **Mr. Gurán**, she said that minors could not be sent to such correctional facilities based on an administrative decision but only on the decision of a judge, as their placement in a correctional institution was regarded as deprivation of liberty.

36. When sentencing an offender, judges took into consideration the nature of the offence as well as the character of the offender. Being the parent of several children or of a young child could be considered by the judge as a facet of the offender's character. Consequently, a judge could impose community service as a punishment, in order to prevent the separation of a parent from his or her child, depending on the nature of the crime and the person in question.

37. A two-tiered system had been introduced to combat corruption within the State party. The central authority in that regard was the Corruption Prevention and Combating Bureau, which carried out criminal investigations and imposed administrative punishments. At a lower level, there was an internal anti-corruption system in each municipality. The Government had recently adopted the Bureau's guidelines for 2015-2020, the main aims of which were to raise awareness of the issue among the general public, improve the Law on Prevention of Conflict of Interest in Activities of Public Officials, enhance anti-corruption systems in Government agencies, and improve control over the financing of political parties.

38. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) said that there were separate places of imprisonment for boys and girls. Since 2008, there had been a fourfold reduction in the number of minors detained, as well as a significant decrease in the number of sentences of deprivation of liberty. The improvement could be attributed to recent reforms of the Criminal Law, to the encouragement of alternative sanctions to the deprivation of liberty, and to intensive training of the judiciary. In response to a question raised by **Ms. Sandberg**, she said that the law allowed for the pretrial detention of minors, albeit with strict time limits.

39. The living conditions of minors held in correctional institutions had greatly improved in recent years. Renovation work had been carried out and new buildings constructed in full compliance with European prison standards. The Ombudsman's Office also carried out regular inspections of correctional institutions and made annual

recommendations. The State allocated funds from its budget to ensure the maintenance of such facilities.

40. Efforts had been made to rehabilitate minors in order to prevent them from reoffending. The Code on Enforcement of Sentences had been amended in 2011, to ensure that each convicted minor received an assessment of his or her risks and individual needs. Steps were also being taken to evaluate existing resocialization programmes, develop updated programmes, and train probation and prison staff. A resocialization programme had also been implemented to provide minors with training in social skills and anger management. Probation officers had been specially trained in order to offer the programme. A special programme for prison staff had also been devised in 2012 to combat inter-prisoner violence. The State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights monitored the situation regularly, and its 2015 report indicated that no cases of inter-prisoner violence had occurred in correctional institutions for minors.

41. Children up to the age of 4 years were entitled by law to stay with their mother in the event of her imprisonment. The mother had to submit a request to the court for her child to stay with her, following which the court judged whether such an arrangement would be in the best interests of the child. After the age of 4 years, the law provided for children to live with their father. If this was not possible, alternative care was sought. There were currently eight children under the age of 4 years living with their mothers in prison. In response to a question raised by **Ms. Muhamad Shariff**, she said that children living in prison facilities had access to playgrounds and were able to share the same room as their mothers, while the cost of their living needs was fully financed by the State.

42. A special training centre for the judiciary had been established and training on children's rights was compulsory for certain members of the judiciary. The State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights provided standardized training on matters pertaining to international and national legislation, as well as on communicating effectively with children. In 2014 100 judges had been trained, and that figure had increased in 2015. A new training programme for the judiciary had been introduced for the period up to 2020, with a budgetary allocation of over €10 million.

43. **Ms. Muhamad Shariff** said that she would like further information on the Cabinet of Ministers regulation requiring the compulsory participation of a representative of a child in the preparation of a pre-sentencing report. She wanted to know what kind of training such representatives were offered and who exactly the representatives were.

44. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the representative was either the parent or the legal guardian of the child. The parent might not necessarily be trained in matters pertaining to children's rights but it was likely that the legal guardian would be.

45. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) said that the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child contained a list of persons who required compulsory training in children's rights. The Law also provided that the State Inspectorate for the Protection of Children's Rights should develop training programmes for all those listed.

46. **Mr. Gastaud** asked whether the judges mentioned as having received training served in juvenile or general courts.

47. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) said that Latvia did not have specialized courts; rather, a specialized judge was attached to each court. Where a judge's services were not required in his or her speciality, he or she could hear other cases.

48. **Ms. Feldmane** (Latvia) said, in reply to a question about breastfeeding, that the Cabinet of Ministers had issued an order on implementing the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes, and Latvian law therefore set out requirements on the quality and labelling of such substitutes. The Centre for Disease Prevention and Control provided information on its website on all aspects of breastfeeding and breast-milk substitutes. Latvia also provided benefits for mothers in the form of prenatal leave and a mandatory 112 days' maternity leave. Moreover, the Labour Law contained provisions to facilitate breastfeeding. Action was planned to monitor the health of infants and to ensure manufacturers' compliance with the rules on advertising. In reply to a question from **Ms. Muhamad Shariff**, she said that there had been no breaches of the Code.

49. Children under the age of 18 years received free health care and medicines. One challenge facing the national health service was the waiting times faced by children requiring treatment. The problem was not due to budgetary constraints, however, but to the fact that parents were anxious to have their children seen by specialists in Riga, where it was felt that the doctors were more qualified. The Government was therefore aiming not only to increase the number of specialists but also to strengthen primary health-care services in rural areas. It was also seeking to raise awareness of the advantages of regional hospitals, which would provide parents with a wider choice. Measures had also been introduced to reduce waiting times for outpatients. Dental care was also available free of charge for minors. There was a shortage of dentists, but dental services were provided by itinerant dentists and regular campaigns were mounted to promote dental health in rural areas.

50. **Ms. Aho Assouma** wondered why no measures had been taken to address the persistent problem of long waiting lists. She also asked how often dental health campaigns were mounted, and how they targeted rural populations.

51. **Ms. Feldmane** (Latvia) said that solving the problem of waiting lists required long-term action. Above all, parents' attitudes must be changed, so that they did not always gravitate to specialist hospitals. However, it was difficult for local authorities to provide the salaries for specialists, since they were in competition with the private sector. As for reaching out to rural areas, the Government was seeking to increase the availability of primary health-care services closer to a person's place of residence.

Initial report of Latvia on the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (CRC/C/OPSC/LVA/1; CRC/C/OPSC/LVA/Q/1 and Add.1)

52. **Mr. Nogueira Neto** (Country Rapporteur for the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography) said that the Committee commended the new legislation adopted by the Latvian Government, but some concerns remained. First, he asked whether the Government could introduce a comprehensive system for collecting data, disaggregated by sex, age and national or ethnic origin and by region and socioeconomic status, relating to all offences covered by the Optional Protocol. Secondly, did the State party envisage adopting a comprehensive policy relating to all the offences covered by the Optional Protocol? Thirdly, did the State party prioritize child trafficking and have an effective mechanism to identify the impact of sexual exploitation on children? It was regrettable that Latvia lacked a general plan to raise public awareness of the Optional Protocol. The Committee would welcome more information on the budget specifically allocated to activities under the Optional Protocol, and it was concerned that measures on the Optional Protocol were taken piecemeal.

53. He therefore wished to know whether there were appropriate mechanisms in place to identify children at risk and prevent them from becoming victims; whether

sufficient information was available on the scale of sexual exploitation in Latvia, including child prostitution and child pornography; and whether it was true that police officers had accepted bribes to release suspected users of child prostitutes. A further concern was that no cases of the sale of children had been reported, even though the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography had noted that sex tourism had increased in Latvia. The Committee was concerned that there was no regulatory framework in place to prevent sex tourism. He also requested confirmation that sexually exploited children under 16 years of age were deemed to be victims rather than being criminalized, since it appeared that, by law, prostitutes over the age of 16 years could be deemed to be perpetrators. Lastly, he would welcome information on investigations into sexual exploitation that had been carried out and on cases in which sexual exploiters of children had been released without charge.

54. **Mr. Madi** said that, in order for the law to be effective, the State party should establish a clear definition of the meaning of the sale of children. He also wished to know whether Latvian courts had extraterritorial jurisdiction over all the offences covered by the Optional Protocol and whether such offences were included in the country's extradition treaties. Indeed, would the State party use the Optional Protocol as a basis for extradition? He was also concerned about protection of the rights of victims. Latvia had a system for identifying victims but, in view of the small number of cases, the Committee needed more information. He wished to know how officials, judges and police were trained in the early identification of victims and what rehabilitation methods were used.

Initial report of Latvia on the implementation of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (CRC/C/OPAC/LVA/1; CRC/C/OPAC/LVA/Q/1 and Add.1)

55. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** (Country Rapporteur for the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict) said that he would like to ask in addition how the State party operated its social recovery and reintegration service for victims under the Optional Protocol and whether cases were followed up.

56. **Mr. Gastaud** said that it was not clear from the report which authority was responsible for coordinating activities under the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict: the Ministry of Welfare, the Ministry of the Interior or the Ministry of Defence. Secondly, he wished to know whether training courses were available not only for police and border officials but also for army personnel or paramilitaries. Thirdly, he would be grateful for more information on the collection of data on violations of the Optional Protocol. He noted that there was no conscription in the State party; enlistment in the armed forces was voluntary after the age of 18 years. Nor were there any military academies, but the Committee was concerned about the Youth Guard organization, which catered for people aged between 12 and 21 years. If it was the case that minors were trained in combat and the use of small arms, such activities ran counter to the provisions of the Optional Protocol. He was also concerned that the Optional Protocol was not sufficiently disseminated among the general public, and children in particular. Did the Criminal Code contain provisions prohibiting the recruitment of children into the army or armed groups? Even though there were no armed groups in Latvia, there was a possibility of children being recruited into armed groups abroad. Lastly, he would be grateful for information on the extraterritorial competence of Latvian jurisdiction and on whether extradition was subject to dual criminality. If so, he wondered whether the State party planned to amend the relevant legislation.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third and fourth periodic reports of Oman (continued)
(CRC/C/OMN/3-4; CRC/C/OMN/Q/3-4 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Oman took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Nelson**, referring to the information furnished at the Committee's 2059th meeting, asked when the study on child labour would be completed and how the Government intended to implement any recommendations stemming from it. He pointed out that, while the recently adopted Children's Act contained many very useful provisions, it failed to address some areas, such as the situation of migrant children and the protection of children who worked in family businesses. He also asked whether the public awareness-raising efforts on HIV/AIDS and drug abuse were being carried out in schools and with young people.

3. **Mr. Cardona Llorens**, stressing that there was a difference between the law and practice, requested further information about specific steps taken to guarantee the rights of children with disabilities. He asked how children with disabilities were integrated into mainstream schools, whether teachers received relevant training and whether accommodations and support were provided. Noting that all the special schools were located in the capital, he wished to know what educational services were available to children from elsewhere in the country. He enquired about measures taken to make sports, leisure and other activities truly accessible to children with disabilities. Given the incidence of intra-family marriages and their known connection with the prevalence of disabilities, he asked what steps were being taken to prevent such marriages from taking place.

4. **Mr. Al Hinai** (Oman), replying to questions raised at the Committee's 2059th meeting, said that relatives could report cases of child abuse, via a hotline, or in writing; anyone who reported such cases had the right to anonymity. The Family Protection Department also had the authority to report cases brought to its attention. When its staff received a complaint, they met with the child and visited any relevant settings such as the home, school or institution. All findings were centrally recorded. The procedure was the same throughout the country. Children were removed from their families only in extreme situations where their safety was at stake, and only by court order.

5. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that the Ministry of Social Development was working in tandem with all the relevant ministries to set up a team of trainers qualified in child protection matters; training was also provided to all professionals who worked with children. A programme was under way to raise awareness of children's rights, a child protection manual was being planned and guidelines were being issued, including one on the treatment of child victims of violence.

6. **Ms. Al Hatmi** (Oman) said that nutrition was one of the most important areas on which the Ministry of Health focused and was included in its five-year plans. Campaigns had been rolled out on the benefits of breastfeeding, leading to a net decrease in the malnutrition rate. A law that had been enacted on breastmilk substitutes contained penalties against companies that infringed its provisions. Psychological health services were available throughout the country. The school health programme had a mental health component and provided for doctors to visit schools. The Al Massarah Hospital in Muscat, which had been established in 2013, had a special child psychology unit. The current focus was the dissemination among health-

care professionals of a manual devoted to children's mental health, as well as the training of primary health-care providers, including school nurses.

7. **Ms. Al Habsi** (Oman) said that the Ministry of Education recruited psychologists and social workers to identify problem cases in schools. Guidance had been developed in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on how to diagnose and report mental health problems in children. Information remained confidential initially; parents were involved in the process at a later stage. The Ministry had adopted a regulation on student affairs which covered disciplinary matters. When a student broke school rules, a committee composed of the school principal, a lawyer and a local government representative was responsible for deciding on the action to be taken, which could range from a warning to a reprimand or temporary suspension. Parents must be involved in all disciplinary procedures. Corporal punishment was absolutely banned.

8. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said that the Personal Status Act covered situations where filiation must be proven via DNA testing; however, such tests could be administered only with a court order. Under the Criminal Code, pregnant women were not subject to the death penalty: it was only once the baby was born that the measure could be applied. When both parents faced a prison sentence, one of the two was exempt if they had a child under 15 years of age. Pregnant inmates received suitable care and could be hospitalized if necessary. Children born to imprisoned mothers were given age-appropriate care and nutrition and, when they reached the age of two, they either stayed with their mother in prison or were placed with their father or relatives, under the supervision of the relevant authorities. Although children over nine were considered capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, the Government was looking into the possibility of raising the age of criminal responsibility.

9. Anyone who exploited a child for begging purposes, including the child's parents, bore criminal responsibility. The Ministry of Social Affairs provided counselling in such situations. Child beggars could be placed in residential centres or foster families. The Children's Act prohibited all forms of child exploitation. Human trafficking was an offence under the law, and children subjected to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation were considered victims and received all the necessary care. Pursuant to the Constitution, no one could be returned to their country of origin if they were accompanied by children. Residence could be granted on humanitarian grounds; for example, in the case of injured children, the family could remain until the child recovered.

10. **Mr. Kotrane** (Country Rapporteur) asked whether the State party might reconsider its policy of permitting children over 16 to volunteer for the military. He pointed out that unlawful adoption and forced labour should be offences under the law.

11. **Ms. Winter** asked why violence against children carried such light penalties and why human rights and fundamental freedoms were not included in school curricula.

12. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** requested additional information on the psychological support units in schools: how many there were, whether all schools had one, how their impact was assessed and how many psychologists and child psychologists they comprised. She asked whether a gender perspective had been incorporated into efforts to prevent violence against children.

13. **Ms. Khazova** (Country Rapporteur) asked how widely available mental health centres were, whether children with behavioural problems were given medical treatment and whether children were taught proper online behaviour and warned about the dangers of the Internet. She requested clarification as to whether or not imprisoned mothers were permitted to have contact with their children.

14. **Ms. Oviedo Fierro** asked about the State party's implementation of the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and requested additional information on the length of maternity leave. She wished to know what measures the Government was taking to address the problem of children with stunted growth.

15. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman), replying to the question about children in the military, said that Oman was not involved in any wars or conflicts, and no armed groups operated on its soil. No one could be recruited into the armed forces, the police or other security forces before the age of 18. Volunteers could receive training and physical fitness instruction as from the age of 16, but could not perform active service.

16. Three specialist schools had been established in Oman for children with disabilities: one for those with impaired hearing, one for those with intellectual disabilities and one for the blind. In addition, a total of 25 Al-Wafa Centres for Rehabilitation of Children with Disabilities had been set up in the governorates. They provided services not only for children's rehabilitation but also for their full integration into the workforce and society. In addition, a number of associations for children with disabilities, including one for children with Down syndrome, were active in Oman, some of which provided specialized medical assistance to children. The Oman Paralympic Committee had been set up in order to permit children suffering from motor disabilities to compete in the Paralympic Games, thereby also fostering their social inclusion.

17. Children who were deprived of a family environment were placed in the Childhood Care Centre, which was attached to the Ministry of Social Development. The Centre provided family-based care modelled on SOS Children's Villages International. Children were encouraged to exchange views with the Centre's professional staff and were offered opportunities to take part in sports and theatre and to travel to other countries.

18. A study on child labour prepared by the Ministry of Social Development indicated that children who worked generally did so within their own family or in order to help in their family's business. Most were aged 15 or older and worked primarily in fishing, shopkeeping or restaurant services. There was no forced child labour in families in Oman.

19. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said that children were allowed to work only in the context of the family and only if such work did not undermine their health or education. Draft legislation on work performed by children, which specified the areas and conditions in which children were allowed to work, was currently under consideration by the Ministry of Labour.

20. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that a comprehensive programme had been set up in order to protect from abuse or neglect children who had been born out of wedlock and who were subsequently placed in foster care. Special training sessions were organized for foster mothers by psychologists and social workers from the Ministry of Social Development, and regular sessions and workshops were held with foster families in order to discuss the problems and challenges they faced.

21. **Ms. Al Hatmi** (Oman) said that sexual and reproductive health was an integral part of public health, and a national strategy on young people's health had been designed on the basis of a 2002 census. Components of the strategy included a special programme for girls on puberty, nutrition and personal hygiene; a guide for young people on smoking and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS; the development of an approach based on case histories of persons with sexually transmitted diseases; and the preparation of a young people's guide on reproductive health. Doctors and nurses in health centres and health workers in schools had been

trained to respond to young people's special needs, and efforts had been undertaken at the international level to compile best practices.

22. On the question about intra-family marriages, she said that a recent census indicated that spouses in 50 per cent of marriages were related to each other within the first or second degree of consanguinity. Despite the fact that that statistic reflected an Omani social tradition, the Government was engaged in wide-ranging efforts to raise awareness of its potentially negative impact on health. In conjunction with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry of Health had organized an international workshop to exchange experiences and was preparing a national action plan. A major component of the plan was an initiative to introduce a mandatory blood test for all prospective spouses which had been submitted to the Council of Ministers for approval. Efforts were also under way to implement a programme under which a set of tests would be administered to screen infants for disabilities and disorders, such as hearing impairment and thyroid deficiency. A review of the situation of infant mortality in Oman revealed that malformation was a causal factor in infant deaths, and several projects and programmes had been set up with the aim of addressing the causes of congenital malformation.

23. **Mr. Al Hinai** (Oman) said that the blood tests that were to be part of programmes to prevent consanguineous marriage were also intended for young people in universities.

24. **Ms. Al Hatmi** (Oman) said that significant progress had been made in reducing malnutrition. Given that Oman had a relatively high rate of consanguineous marriages, which could give rise to blood-related disorders, the Ministry of Health had proposed routine initial screening for anaemia in children at 9 months of age and again at 18 months. Since some 54 per cent of the children already tested suffered from anaemia, a project had been implemented to ensure that they received iron supplements.

25. Children requiring advanced psychiatric treatment had to be transported to hospitals in the capital to receive it, but in addition, nationwide, some 58 specialists provided psychological assistance to children. Children with behavioural problems were monitored in accordance with special protocols, and drug treatment was provided when deemed medically necessary.

26. Stunting was caused by a variety of factors, not malnutrition alone. It could often be traced to maternal prenatal health: for example, records showed that 24.8 per cent of pregnant women in Oman had some form of iron deficiency and 1.3 per cent had hypertension, factors that could affect fetal development during pregnancy and lead to low birth weight. Approximately 8.9 per cent of the newborns in Oman were underweight.

27. **The Chair** asked for confirmation on two points: whether there was now no law prohibiting female genital mutilation, since the relevant bill had not yet been adopted; and whether Omani men often married girls from South-East Asia and then had the marriage annulled, subsequently exploiting the girls for domestic work. He requested clarification concerning reports that the Criminal Code prescribed leniency for men who committed offences in order to save the honour of a female relative who had been engaged in unlawful sexual relations.

The meeting was suspended at 11.35 a.m. and resumed at 11.50 a.m.

28. **Ms. Al Habsi** (Oman) said that all schools in Oman had a staff psychologist, psychiatrist and nurse. The Ministry of Education supervised and evaluated their work through on-site inspections, centralized workplans and assessments of the extent to which students benefited from it.

29. In cooperation with international partners, United Nations agencies, the relevant ministries and civil society organizations, the National Committee for Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances had formulated a national strategy to combat narcotics that adopted a rights-based approach and set specific indicators for raising awareness of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. A unit within the Ministry of Education formulated awareness-raising programmes that were subsequently implemented in all schools. School curricula included modules on the dangers of HIV/AIDS and drug addiction in a class on life skills designed for children in grades 1 to 12 — Oman was one of the first countries in the Gulf region to introduce such a class. Other classes, such as natural science, social science and Islamic studies, also included warnings and information on HIV/AIDS and drug addiction.

30. Every school in Oman had a gym, and students had physical education class every morning in the schoolyard. The Ministry of Sports also organized sports for children, including girls, during school summer holidays.

31. **Mr. Al Hinai** (Oman) said that article 72 of the Children's Act prescribed a term of imprisonment ranging from 5 to 15 years and a fine of from 5,000 to 10,000 Omani rials for forced recruitment of children into armed forces or sexual exploitation of children. The Government considered female genital mutilation to be a harmful traditional practice: it was banned under article 20 of the Children's Act. A bill that would specifically prohibit the practice was expected to be adopted in the near future.

32. Marriages involving foreign workers, including foreign domestic workers, were regulated by the Labour Act and other relevant laws, violations of which were subject to criminal sanctions. No instances of honour crimes had been reported. Incest was punishable by strict penalties, including capital punishment.

33. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said that the Family Protection Department worked in coordination with the prison authorities to facilitate communication between imprisoned mothers and their children.

34. Protection of the environment was a key concern of the Government. The Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs had been established to ensure, among other things, the protection of water resources and the supply of safe drinking water throughout the country. In accordance with the legislation on environmental protection, all oil refineries and related facilities were located far from urban areas.

35. Employers were generally not in favour of extending the length of maternity leave, for reasons that included issues of gender equality. Although employers allowed breaks for breastfeeding mothers, consideration was being given to putting forward legislative proposals regulating breastfeeding times during working hours.

36. The right to freedom of opinion for children was guaranteed under the Children's Act. Children were thus free to express their opinions within the family, and their views were taken into account when family issues were addressed. Although children born out of wedlock generally remained with their mothers, placement in a care centre might be ordered if such action was considered to be in their best interests.

37. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that it was important to bear in mind that employers in the private sector, who focused on ensuring the viability of their businesses, would weigh very carefully the financial implications of any proposals to extend the duration of maternity leave. As to environmental protection, it should be noted that, in addition to introducing legislative measures, the authorities worked closely with civil society organizations to meet international standards.

38. **Ms. Khazova** asked whether girls aged 16 who became pregnant were punishable by law and what support was provided for the poorest households.

39. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** asked what regulations on the naming of children born out of wedlock were in place. She wished to know how many facilities were able to carry out court-ordered DNA tests to establish filiation and whether the delegation could provide examples of cases of denial of paternity that had been decided on the basis of such tests.

40. **Mr. Kotrane** said that the Committee considered that maternity leave was not at variance with the principle of gender equality and recommended that the State party should introduce a period of maternity leave of not less than 14 weeks, in line with the International Labour Organization Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).

41. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that his Government was cooperating with the World Bank on a social safety net to ensure a decent standard of living for all workers. Low-income households that were not eligible for other social benefits were entitled to assistance, in the form of a monthly cash transfer, from the social security fund, which was administered by the Ministry of Social Development. Education grants were available to ensure access to higher education for students from low-income backgrounds. More than 150,000 social housing units had been built for vulnerable families in recent years. All persons able and willing to work were assisted by the authorities in securing employment in either the public or private sector. Children born out of wedlock enjoyed the same rights as other children, including the attribution of a family name at the time that their birth was registered.

42. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that women who gave birth out of wedlock were not liable to criminal punishment. While children born to adolescent mothers usually remained within their family environment, they could be placed in an institution or with a foster family if it was deemed to be in their best interests or the mother so wished.

43. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said that DNA tests to establish a child's parentage could be carried out in forensic and other laboratories. Specific examples of court cases involving such tests would be provided at a later date.

44. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that a number of programmes had been introduced to protect children from harmful content and raise awareness among children of the dangers of the Internet, including campaigns on cybersecurity.

45. **Ms. Al Yazidy** (Oman) said that all mothers under the age of 16 were able to complete their education, either at secondary school or, alternatively, through adult education programmes.

46. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said the legislation on combating cybercrime that had been adopted provided for criminal sanctions, including prison terms, for those who produced, distributed or purchased materials depicting child pornography or who incited or facilitated child prostitution.

47. The existing legislation governing children born out of wedlock, including their personal status, was based on sharia and reflected the customs and practices of society at the time it had been drafted. It was possible that consideration would be given to reviewing that legislation in order better to reflect current social reality and to ensure that it was fully compliant with the principle of the best interests of the child, including in respect of custody matters.

48. **Ms. Ayoubi Idrissi** asked whether the Government intended to give legal recognition to the right of mothers to exercise testamentary guardianship over their children and whether it planned to replace the ages at which a mother's right to custody of a child ended, namely seven years for boys and the onset of puberty for girls, with a single, harmonized age limit.

49. **Ms. Al Issai** (Oman) said that, although the current age limits were generally considered appropriate, courts were able to exercise considerable discretion in such matters.

50. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that the Ministry of Social Development would continue to collaborate with the judicial authorities on guardianship rights to ensure that, where possible, mothers — rather than other, more distant, relatives — were able financially to exercise guardianship over their children.

51. **Ms. Al Bulushi** (Oman) said that the authorities worked with various partners to promote and protect the right of children to freedom of opinion and expression. Children's views were canvassed through a range of activities and events and duly taken into account in programmes and strategies affecting them.

52. **Ms. Al Hatmi** (Oman) said that the law banning the marketing and promotion of breastmilk replacements, which had been in place since 1998, established sanctions for non-compliance.

53. **The Chair** asked whether the State party would give consideration to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, which at present stood at nine years.

54. **Mr. Kotrane** asked whether the study on the possibility of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 12 years, which was mentioned in the State party's written replies to the list of issues (CRC/C/OMN/Q/3-4/Add.1), had been undertaken.

55. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that the issue of raising the minimum age had been discussed with the judicial authorities and specialists in the area of criminal responsibility and that the Government would report to the Committee on the outcome of those discussions in due course.

56. **Mr. Abdulla Nasser Al Rahbi** (Oman) said that reports indicating that some foreign women who contracted marriage in Oman were subsequently exploited for domestic work were incorrect. Only those foreigners who were duly authorized by the Ministry of Manpower were able to work in the State party, and that included foreigners who had married an Omani citizen abroad.

57. **Mr. Kotrane** (Country Rapporteur) thanked the delegation for providing the Committee with a clear picture of the situation of children in Oman. The various policies and legislative measures that had been taken by the Government in the period under review, in particular the Children's Act, had further strengthened the implementation of the Convention in many areas. That notwithstanding, further work remained to be done, for example the introduction of implementing regulations for the Act. The State party should also consider acceding to the Optional Protocol on a communications procedure and ratifying other international instruments, including the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183) and the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). In its concluding observations, the Committee would, among other things, draw attention to discrimination against certain categories of children and the need to give full effect to the Children's Act.

58. **Ms. Khazova** (Country Rapporteur) expressed appreciation to the delegation for the many replies given to the Committee's questions. In its recommendations, the Committee would certainly raise the issue of the minimum age of criminal responsibility. While significant progress had been made in furthering children's rights in the public sphere, more efforts were required to develop a culture of children's rights in the domestic sphere.

59. **Mr. Al Kalbani** (Oman) said that the dialogue had given his delegation a valuable opportunity to provide the Committee with an accurate picture of the actual situation of children's rights in Oman. His Government would pay close attention to the Committee's recommendations and continue to work to fully implement relevant legislation and provide the best possible services for the children of Oman.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.

United Nations CRC/C/SR.2062

Convention on the Rights of the Child

Distr.: General
15 January 2016

Original: English

Committee on the Rights of the Child
Seventy-first session

Summary record of the 2062nd (Chamber A) meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 13 January 2016, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Aldoseri

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports of States parties (*continued*)

Combined third to fifth periodic reports of Latvia (continued) (CRC/C/LVA/3-5; CRC/C/LVA/Q/3-5 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Latvia took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Feldmane** (Latvia) said that approximately 92 per cent of all children in Latvia received health care. Some 78,000 children living in rural areas obtained dental care in a State-funded dental bus, which visited municipalities for two days every year. The Children's Clinical University Hospital would evaluate the results of efforts to reduce the waiting time for health care services in April or May 2015.

3. Replying to the question regarding measures to curb the number of unwanted pregnancies, she explained that, under the Law on Sexual and Reproductive Health, everyone had the right to obtain information from health-care practitioners on the basic principles of ensuring good sexual and reproductive health, as well as on family planning and contraception. Practitioners had a duty to explain the importance of and to provide advice on contraception once a young person had reached child-bearing age. Youngsters had a responsibility to obtain that basic information and to take care of their own sexual and reproductive health. In order to assist them in that respect, the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control held seminars in schools at which informative material about youth sexuality and contraception was distributed. Over 600 such seminars had been organized between 2012 and 2015. Two educational films about responsible behaviour in boy-girl relationships had been produced and recommendations on ways in which teachers could improve sex education in school had been issued. Health-care specialists, gynaecologists and urologists had participated in a press conference attended by over 200 secondary school pupils, where various aspects of sexual and reproductive health had been explained. The aforementioned Law made provision for the conducting of abortions on adolescents and set out the requirements in respect of the information that patients and their parents had to be given in such cases. The quality of the relevant services was monitored by the Health Inspectorate.

4. Girls could consult gynaecologists without requiring referral by another doctor. The list of child-friendly health-care specialists which had been published by an NGO included eight gynaecologists. There were plans to expand that network once future requirements had been assessed. The four priorities in the health sector for the period 2014-2020 were: to promote mothers' and children's general, sexual and reproductive health; to raise the quality of health-care services for children; to shorten waiting lists through the improvement of the health-care infrastructure and to ensure the supply of condoms free of charge at HIV prevention points.

5. In response to the question about mental health, she said that the Public Health Strategy 2014-2020 made provision for measures to foster mental health, raise the community's awareness of that issue, train family doctors to detect depression at an early stage, offer support to persons suffering from depression and improve mental health services by increasing the range of State-funded outpatient care. A campaign "Don't be ignorant" to develop public awareness of the first symptoms of depression along with skills to assist sufferers had been launched and a web page on the subject had been posted by the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. A programme to detect depression among schoolchildren and address the problem of bullying, which *was one of the root causes of youth depression and suicide, would continue into 2017*. Many campaigns were likewise being run to encourage a healthy and physically active

lifestyle as another means of preventing depression. Children suffering from depression or mental disorders could attend the above-mentioned outpatient facilities. Since substance abuse was another cause of depression and mental illness, in 2015 a large number of measures had also been introduced to combat the distribution of narcotic and psychotropic substances. The Centre for Disease Prevention and Control conducted information campaigns in schools to dissuade pupils from taking drugs and to persuade them to take part in sport as an alternative leisure activity. Hospital treatment was available for young drug users and rehabilitation services had been improved in 2014 with the opening of new treatment facilities. Links between medical and community rehabilitation services were going to be strengthened with a view to furthering the reintegration of former young substance abusers in society.

6. **Ms. Sandberg** wished to know if children with disabilities were placed in mental health institutions and what measures were taken to prevent their placement in such facilities.

7. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that, of the approximately 8,000 children with disability in Latvia, only 300 were in institutional care. All children with disability were receiving education appropriate to their capabilities.

8. **Ms. Sandberg** asked what support measures were available to children with disabilities.

9. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) replied that children with disability received assistance in travelling between their home and their school as well as assistance in the school environment.

10. **Ms. Aho Assouma** reminded the delegation that it had not replied to the question concerning infant and maternal mortality.

11. **Ms. Feldmane** (Latvia) said that the annual level of maternal mortality was extremely low and stood at about 3-5 deaths. Infant mortality was falling and had resulted in 83 deaths in 2014.

12. **Ms. Aho Assouma** wished to know what the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate was among young people. She asked whether there was a programme to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. She wondered if condoms were distributed free of charge to young people, what type of care was available for children living with HIV/AIDS, whether they had access to free treatment and whether prenatal HIV screening was free of charge.

13. **Ms. Feldmane** (Latvia) said that some 8,600 people in Latvia were living with HIV/AIDS with approximately 300 new HIV infections detected every year, 5-10 of which were children, in most cases infected through mother-to-child transmission. Fifty-seven children were currently living with HIV. Women were screened for HIV until the twelfth week of pregnancy and they were rapidly tested for HIV during delivery if they had not undergone prenatal screening. In accordance with World Health Organization recommendations, children received post-exposure treatment in order to prevent mother-to-child transmission. In 2015 the Government had provided additional funding for the treatment of HIV patients and, as a result, transmission rates were expected to decline. HIV screening for pregnant women and HIV/AIDS treatment were State-funded. Measures to prevent HIV mainly targeted injecting drug users. Information about the risks of HIV transmission, consultations on other sexual health issues, rapid HIV tests and free contraceptives were provided at the 18 HIV prevention points run by the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, in cooperation with NGOs and municipalities. There were plans to expand the network of those points in order to facilitate access to them for vulnerable sectors of the population. The increased budget for HIV treatment meant that the number of

recipients of antiretroviral therapy would rise from 20 to possibly 27 per cent of persons living with HIV/AIDS.

14. In response to the question concerning health care for refugees, she said that refugees could avail themselves of all health services in the same way as other inhabitants of Latvia. The health service budget was allocated on an annual basis and health spending was audited by the State.

15. **Ms. Aho Assouma** asked whether treatment for iodine deficiency in children was free of charge. She wished to know if there was a long waiting list for the treatment of goitre. She would also be grateful for information on measures to reduce the long waiting list for treatment of children's mental health problems. Was a lengthy wait not likely to worsen their condition?

16. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that services were available for victims of sexual abuse. A programme focusing on the rehabilitation of adolescents, managed by the Ministry of Welfare, was being adapted to include both medical and social rehabilitation. Regarding the availability of medical services for persons suffering from AIDS and HIV, all possible means were used to ensure that there was no waiting list.

17. **Ms. Feldmane** (Latvia) said that pregnant women were provided with HIV tests free of charge and that there was no waiting list. The same applied to patients living with HIV. A special programme was in place for iodine supplementation. Informative campaigns were also organized on the importance of iodine in the diet and there were requirements that schools provide iodine-rich meals.

18. **The Chair**, speaking as a Committee member, asked whether children born in Latvia to migrant parents were granted Latvian nationality.

19. **Ms. Līce** (Latvia) said that, in accordance with the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, no additional hurdles affected children born in Latvia to migrants. The naturalization procedure was identical for all children born in the country. There had been few such cases in practice, as Latvia did not have a large number of asylum seekers or migrants, but there was no legal impediment to the granting of nationality.

20. **Ms. Stabiņa** (Latvia) said that the Ministry of Interior had a disaggregated data system, which incorporated information from a range of different systems and enabled the Ministry to undertake coordination and to monitor measures and evaluate the results achieved. Further training and awareness-raising campaigns were then organized in response to the evaluation. There were a number of main information providers for the system, all of which contributed disaggregated data. They included the criminal procedure information system, that provided data on all criminal proceedings, including comprehensive, disaggregated data about victims and the offences committed; the judicial information system, which fed in information on the legal system, including civil and criminal cases and the numbers of convictions; and information on victims of trafficking collected by the Ministry of Welfare, including disaggregated data on the services provided to victims, such as social rehabilitation and support services.

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21. **Ms. Stabiņa** (Latvia) said that there were two main policy planning documents in use in Latvia to prevent the offences mentioned in the Optional Protocols. The first was a comprehensive, national strategy, targeting society at large as well as institutions and professionals, aimed at preventing youth crime and improving the

safety of children. As part of that strategy, informative and educational activities were organized for children, on topics including morality and sexuality. The second document covered the issue of trafficking and was structured as a comprehensive source of information. It contained general information on trends and research and the provision of services for victims, such as legal aid and helplines. In addition it supported the legal framework to combat human trafficking and fostered cooperation between law enforcement agencies. With regard to the issue of trafficking, there were two main policy goals in Latvia: firstly to provide assistance and support to victims and secondly to reduce the phenomenon of human trafficking in general. Those goals were achieved by preventing and combating trafficking and by coordinating the collection of information. All the activities mentioned were carried out in close collaboration with a range of civil society partners.

22. Training and awareness-raising activities on human trafficking had been conducted, targeting a wide range of professionals, including politicians, judges, police officers, teachers and librarians. The training normally covered issues such as the identification of potential victims of trafficking, prevention measures, information on the relevant legal provisions and way of referring victims to the appropriate government bodies. In collaboration with NGOs, a large number of informative activities, including exhibitions and multimedia projects, had been organized for children, in order to raise awareness of the problem of trafficking. Such activities aimed to communicate with young people about issues including trafficking, pornography and prostitution in an accessible and understandable way, and covered subjects such as avoiding risks and threats and Internet safety.

23. There was no special budget available to implement the provisions of the Optional Protocols. Funding for counter-trafficking measures was allocated to the relevant stakeholders, under the annual State budget. Special funds were earmarked for State-funded social rehabilitation for trafficking victims or victims of other similar offences. A national assistance system for victims of trafficking had been put in place in 2006, governing the ways in which victims should access social rehabilitation services. Guidelines were also available to participants, including border guards and police officers, on identifying victims of human trafficking. The Ministry of the Interior worked closely with the Council of the Baltic Sea States to implement projects to strengthen the role of municipal authorities in tackling cases of human trafficking, including in identifying potential child and adult victims and in improving local coordination efforts.

24. **Mr. Madi** said that the Committee appreciated the delegation's comments on the systems and laws in place to deal with the issue of trafficking in the State party. However the delegation should also provide information on victims of the other offences under the Optional Protocols, in particular on how Government officials and social workers were trained to identify victims of those offences at an early stage and what rehabilitation mechanisms were available to the victims.

25. **Ms. Stabiņa** (Latvia) said that early identification was clearly defined in the Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child. All Latvian citizens had a duty to immediately report to the authorities any suspicions that any children might be victims of violations of their rights. Individuals working in fields such as health care, education or politics who received such information from a member of the public were also legally required to notify the relevant Government entities. In that regard NGOs were valuable partners, as they often came into contact with children who were most exposed to violations of the provisions of the Optional Protocols. Guidelines were also available on how to report such suspicions and what actions to take in such cases.

26. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that adoption was certified through a secure three-tier system, involving numerous courts and the Prosecutor General's Office. Any

suspicions of forced adoption would be investigated by the police. There were a number of comprehensive checks in place to avoid illegal or forced adoption.

27. **Mr. Guráň** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would like to receive a clear answer on whether there were private organizations working in the field of adoption in the State party and, if so, if a system of accreditation was in place. Was intercountry adoption conducted via State agencies or private organizations?

28. **Mr. Madi** said that the legal system in the State party was lacking a clear definition of the sale of children. For instance, forced adoption could fall under the heading of sale of children. The laws appeared to be fragmented and should be consolidated into a single definition.

29. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the Ministry of Welfare was responsible for adoptions and all adoption agencies had to be accredited. There were no private adoption agencies in Latvia.

30. **Mr. Madi** said that many States parties misconstrued the issues of the sale and trafficking of children but that it was crucial to distinguish between the two crimes.

31. **Ms. Stabiņa** (Latvia) said that, while domestic legislation did not set forth separate definitions of the trafficking and sale of children, it qualified them as offences and covered all the elements of the Protocol, including pornography, prostitution and forced adoption. The law also provided for all child victims of trafficking or sale to be defined as such and given rehabilitative care and assistance.

32. **Mr. Madi** emphasized that, although there was indeed reference to the sale of children in the State party's legal system, the specific acts constituting the sale of children were not defined.

33. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the Committee's concerns had been duly noted.

34. **Ms. Smiltēna** (Latvia) said that a special body had been set up to deal with general corruption. An independent unit had also been established under the Ministry of Interior to monitor, detect and prosecute cases of corruption in the police services, which had resulted in reduced levels of corruption and increased levels of trust in the police services. In 2014, four police officers had been convicted for accepting bribes. No cases had been reported under the Protocol.

35. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the close monitoring of corruption and bribery in the police contributed to keeping such cases at bay. In addition, the unit responsible for monitoring police corruption held an annual meeting with the State police and liaised with the prosecutor's office. The possession of pornographic material involving children was a criminal offence under Latvian law.

36. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) said that social rehabilitation plans for child victims of violent crime, such as sexual abuse, were formulated on an individual basis. The victims were provided with, inter alia, psychological support, safe emergency accommodation, access to education, leisure facilities, self-defence instruction, and legal representation. More specific rehabilitation services were provided for child victims of trafficking by the competent NGO, and comprised a personalized plan for psychological and social support, safe shelter, translation and legal representation in court proceedings, and reintegration procedures into society and, where appropriate, the labour market. Where the child was a foreign national, a risk assessment was carried out prior to ensuring a safe return. Where the minor was a third-country national, a temporary residence permit was granted, reparation awarded, legal aid provided, and social rehabilitation made available for up to 180 days. Although domestic legislation did not specifically prohibit child prostitution, a foreign national

found purchasing sexual services from a minor was liable to prosecution pursuant to legislation on trafficking in persons.

37. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** asked for further details regarding the rehabilitation programmes and activities for child victims of trafficking.

38. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) said that the social rehabilitation programmes were based on the Convention and were implemented as soon as victims were identified. Needs assessments were conducted before drawing up individual rehabilitation programmes, which included comprehensive support and social reintegration activities. The victims' names were kept confidential. Although to date only a small number of children had benefited from rehabilitation, the programmes had thus far produced positive results.

39. **Ms. Stabiņa** (Latvia) said that in order to remove any ambiguity with regard to the legal age of a minor, an amendment to the Law on Protection of the Rights of the Child had recently been adopted by Parliament stipulating that any person under 18 years of age was considered a minor and should be treated as such under criminal law.

The meeting was suspended at 4.40 p.m. and resumed at 4.50 p.m.

40. **Ms. Stabiņa** (Latvia) said that section 154 (2) of the Criminal Law contained a definition of trafficking in persons. It also covered the definition of the sale of children as set out in article 2 (a) of the Protocol, and included recruitment, transportation, transfer, concealment or reception of children for the purpose of exploitation, abduction and the offer of benefits for the purposes of obtaining consent. The prohibition of illegal adoption was encompassed in the prohibition against the holding of a person in slavery or servitude set out in that section.

41. **Ms. Smiltēna** (Latvia) said that the Constitution provided for extradition of Latvian citizens to a requesting country only in cases where a bilateral agreement had been concluded between the two States in question. However, in accordance with the Criminal Code, any person holding a Latvian permanent residence permit who committed a crime in a State with which no agreement was in place was held liable to prosecution under Latvian jurisdiction, regardless of whether the acts were criminalized in the State in which they had been committed. To date, the Government had not considered applying the Protocol in order to carry out extraditions.

42. **Mr. Madi** said that, while he welcomed the fact that extraterritorial jurisdiction over crimes in the Protocol was applied without the condition of double criminality, he was concerned that that condition was applied with respect to extradition. He wondered whether there were plans to include as extraditable offences in any extradition treaty existing with another State party the crimes committed under both Protocols to the Convention.

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43. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the Government recognized the urgency of preparing for refugees entering the country and had developed a rehabilitation and integration plan to provide specialist support to refugees upon their arrival in Latvia. A separate budget line for identifying and supporting refugee children who had been involved in armed conflict had also been introduced and efforts had been made to disseminate the Optional Protocol more widely among the general public.

44. Children's participation in the Youth Guard movement was voluntary and the organization was very similar in structure and format to the Scout movement. The scheme promoted civic awareness and patriotism and did not serve as preparation for

the military. It offered children the chance to learn about Latvian history, commemorate key national historical events and play sports.

45. **Mr. Gastaud** (Country Rapporteur for the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict) asked whether the Government had taken steps to define the recruitment of children for use in overseas armed conflict by non-State armed groups as an offence. He also wished to know whether weapon handling training offered as part of the activities organized by the Youth Guard movement would be prohibited for children under the age of 18.

46. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) said that, in the wake of the events in Ukraine, the Government had amended the Criminal Code to define the illegal recruitment of persons for use in overseas armed conflict by non-State armed groups as an offence. The illegal participation in or financing of overseas armed conflict had also been prohibited. Those amendments had entered into force in 2015.

47. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that national weapon handling legislation set the minimum age for participation in shooting activities and events as 12 years for category D weapons, 16 years for category B and C weapons and 18 years for category A weapons. Shooting in Latvia was considered to be a national sporting pursuit and children in the Youth Guard movement practised shooting as part of a wide range of other sporting activities.

48. **Mr. Madi**, supported by **Mr. Gastaud**, asked whether the Government intended to amend the Criminal Code to explicitly prohibit the recruitment of children for use in overseas armed conflict by non-State armed groups and to provide for harsher sentences for the perpetrators of such acts, in accordance with article 4 of the Optional Protocol.

49. **Mr. Rodríguez Reyes** said that he would like more detailed information on the use of weapons by under 18s in the Youth Guard movement, including whether there was any military training component to the shooting exercises.

50. **The Chair** asked whether live ammunition was used in shooting activities involving children under 18.

51. **Mr. Guráň** asked whether specific procedures had been established to identify refugee children who had been involved in armed conflict and, if so, what rehabilitation measures were available to facilitate their reintegration into society.

52. **Ms. Medina** (Latvia) said that, while recent legislative amendments prohibiting the recruitment of persons for use in overseas armed conflict by non-State armed groups made no express reference to minors, other provisions of the Criminal Code explicitly provided that the involvement of minors in criminal offences constituted an aggravating circumstance. Persons found guilty of recruiting children for use in overseas armed conflict would therefore be subject to harsh punishments.

53. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) explained that shooting was one of many sporting activities offered to children by the Youth Guard movement. It was not a form of military training. Children under 18 did not shoot at targets and spent most of their time running or taking part in other outdoor activities.

54. To date, no refugee children in Latvia had been identified or registered as former child soldiers. The Government had recently sent liaison officers to Greece and Italy to speak with refugees due to arrive in Latvia within the coming months and carry out background checks on their possible involvement in armed conflict. It had also offered training to professionals responsible for welcoming refugees with the support of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in order to improve the identification of children who had been involved in armed conflict.

55. **Mr. Madi** asked whether the Government had set a minimum age for the recruitment of personnel by private security companies.

56. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the minimum age for private security officers had been set at 18. A large proportion of persons working in the private security sector were retired policemen.

57. **Mr. Gastaud** asked whether the Optional Protocol had been translated into Latvian and other minority languages.

58. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) said that the Optional Protocol was available in Latvian and the official United Nations languages. The Government had also disseminated the Optional Protocol more widely among the general public following the events in Ukraine and the Syrian Arab Republic.

59. **Mr. Gastaud** thanked the delegation for its detailed and well-structured replies and expressed the hope that the State party would give due consideration to the Committee's recommendations.

60. **Mr. Gurán** said that he had welcomed the opportunity to learn more about the situation for children in the State party and thanked the delegation for its professional and well-organized approach.

61. **Ms. Jaunzeme** (Latvia) thanked the Committee for its insightful and useful comments. Her country remained firmly committed to upholding children's rights in all spheres of life.

62. **The Chair** thanked the delegation for the open and constructive dialogue and urged the State party to continue its efforts to promote and protect children's rights.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.